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COMICS **scene**

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June '93

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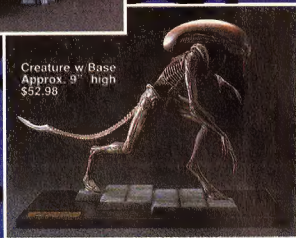
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WORD BALLOONS

Greetings

Hey, nice to see you. How ya been? Great weather we're having, isn't it? Really glad to see you showed up. With countless other options to choose from, we're certainly happy you're here, perusing this very issue of COMICS SCENE.

First of all, I gotta tell you that we didn't expect to be here ourselves to meet and greet you. Why? Well, in the recent past, only seven issues of COMICS SCENE have been published yearly, supplemented by two issues of a companion magazine, COMICS SCENE SPECTACULAR, out in May and July. That was all well and good. After all, the two were essentially the same magazine, one with posters, one without—until 1992, when CS #6 and #7 were prepared by a different editorial team (in a company-wide re-shuffling to make everyone's editorial responsibilities more manageable).

And thus, originally, COMICS SCENE #35 wasn't supposed to be out until lots later. Like sometime next month.

But it's here now. You're holding it in your hands, crisp, freshly printed. How can this be? It's not a dream. Not a hoax. Not an imaginary story.

That's all true. But what if, what if the publishers fought the Avengers? What if they all became vampires? (Too late!) What if Gilbert Gottfried owned the Cosmic Cube?

In this case, it's "What if SPECTACULAR shuffled off to limbo and those two on-sale dates were awarded to COMICS SCENE?" And that's what happened. CS SPECTACULAR is no more (for now), whereas COMICS SCENE is now on sale *nine* times a year. And since this decision was made very late in the game, we couldn't even warn you about it last issue. We didn't know ourselves. And boy, did we get awfully busy producing this issue!

But, hey, warning or no, you're here anyway. Thanks. We appreciate that because we know that with every passing week, there are more options to choose from. The comics press is no longer just the *Comic Buyers' Guide* (fandom's weekly bible), *The Comics Journal* (the monthly of serious criticism), *Comics Interview* (collected conversations with everyone) and COMICS SCENE. Now, it seems like everybody and his brother, and his brother's chiropractor, and his brother's chiropractor's cousin Irv, are publishing brand new "magazines" about the field, most of them recklessly preaching that the comics you just bought Tuesday will be worth gazillions in two months (or two weeks, or possibly by Thursday).

And sadly, some fans actually *believe* in all those price guide delusions. It's a mass hallucination, collectors' edition version polybagged in four-color. (With foil-edged trading cards and an April Fools Honorary Birth Certificate) But that's another word balloon altogether, isn't it?

Anyhow, we're glad to be here. We're glad you're here. And we're glad to be publishing, this issue, Senior Contributing Writer Kim Howard Johnson's essay "Crisis of Infinite Comics" (illustrated by Kevin Brockschmidt). You can find it on page 9. Read it.

It may be the *most important* article we've *ever* published.

In fact, it's as least as important as John Byrne's candid "Company Man" essay (the original CS #2, 1982), Jan Strnad's controversial thoughts on rating comics (the original CS #10, 1983), *Batman* screenwriter Sam Hamm's revelations about that film (CS #3, 1988) and the interview with Doc Savage creator Lester Dent (conducted in 1945, first published in CS #28, 1992).

Why is this essay so important? Because it predicts overabundance and doom and gloom (not to mention darkness, desperation and death). Darwinian times are approaching for this field, an autumn for the existence of comic books. And *when* it comes true—I sure do wish I was so optimistic as to say with a straight face *if* it comes true—it'll be hemlock and arsenic all around. Body bags in polybags.

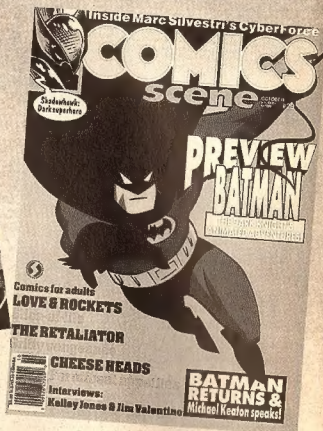
But who knows? Maybe, just maybe, Howard is wrong. Maybe every comic book and comics store will survive. Maybe everyone will prosper. And maybe all this collector speculation is really good for comics.

Sure, and maybe superheroes are real. Maybe we'll all live forever. And maybe pigs will fly.

—David McDonnell/Editor

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...The more I think about it, the more I think that it *should* have been illegal. I know that it was unethical, and in other businesses, such as retail, it is illegal. So why wasn't it illegal for comic shops?

What am I talking about? I'm talking about the practice that many comic shops all over the nation undertook when the special *Superman* #75 came out—selling it for inflated prices. My local comic shops and bookstores didn't do this because they felt it *unethical*. I didn't have to worry about it anyway because I ordered my copy from my subscription service. But if I would have been faced with this problem, I wouldn't have gotten the book. Not only couldn't I have afforded the prices that many comic shops were asking, but I would not have paid such prices even if I had been able to do so.

In other types of businesses, such as retail stores like K-Mart and Wal-Mart, if an item has two prices on it, then they have to sell the item to you at the *lower* price, regardless of the loss. Or if they happen to mis-mark something at a lower price, they have to give it to you for the lower price.

Now I know that comics are slightly different because after a certain amount of time, they become subject to back issue pricing. But what is the time limit? Is it the minute the book gets into the shop? If that's the case, then what's to stop shops from raising the prices of *all* books that they sell? I would have thought that, at the very earliest, a book didn't become a back issue until the following issue was released, at the latest until the cover date month ended.

Just as the comics publishing industry is thinking in terms of *immediate* profits, so are the comic shops. And while I'm all for profits and know that businesses must make a profit in order to survive, there should be

some things that they aren't allowed to do. And, as I've heard that some shops have experienced due to this practice, worrying about immediate profits can sometimes backfire. Patrons of some shops will be going elsewhere because the owners raised the price of *Superman* #75, even on those who placed advance orders. It won't be long until the publishing business starts feeling the effects of its practice of immediate profits above all else.

I wonder just how many people now regret paying such high prices? Most of my friends weren't impressed with this story, as they felt it too simplistic. I know that I complain when I've paid even \$1.25 for a book that I've not enjoyed, so I can imagine how I would feel if I had paid \$10, \$15, or \$20+ for a

comic (an excellent book that richly deserves the coverage it has been getting), I was both upset and disappointed by the treatment the older *Legion* book received.

What did I not like? Well, first of all, I *didn't* like the way you kept saying, "If you hated the *Legion*..." I know that it may sound like nit-picking, but it comes off as bothersome to me and other *Legion* fans. More importantly though, I was bothered by the talk of how the *Legion* is "inaccessible" to new readers because of all the characters and complex plotlines. Now, I will be the first to admit that *Legion* isn't the easiest book to pick up cold, but you make it sound like it's the only comic to have this problem! There are other books that suffer from this, not the least being *The X-Men*.

brought up, I never hear of the *X-Men* being brought to task, while the *Legion* almost always seems to be picked on, even though it rarely ever crosses over into another book (the last time I remember being the "Time and Time Again" saga in the Super-titles back in 1991). Almost all stories stay in the *Legion*. My last problem is the lack of information and artwork for the elder *Legion* book in the article. How is a new potential reader supposed to get interested in the title if you have so little information about it?

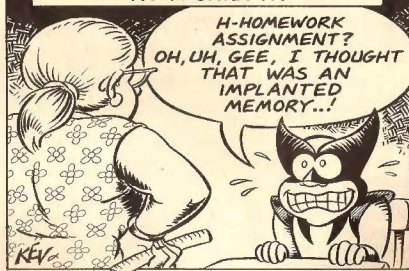
Lastly, I would like to address your readership, who might be wondering why they should try out the elder *Legion* book. I mean, after all, with this young *Legion* book, why bother, right? Well, first of all the *Legion* has a wealth of wonderful history, like the fact that it, and not veteran hero teams like the Justice League or the Fantastic Four, was the very first super team of the Silver Age, first appearing in *Adventure Comics* #247, in early 1958. Second, it has the most well-developed and human cast of characters in all of mainstream comics, having been through almost everything imaginable, ranging from death and widowhood to wife abuse. Third, it has a gallery of villains almost second to none. Finally, there are the *Legion* fans, who are totally dedicated to this team and this book. They are known to stay with it through thick and thin, because of their love for the characters (and I should know, because I am one). It seems to me that any comic that can inspire this kind of dedication must have something going for it, something that should be worth discovering.

All in all, I just want to say that *The Legion of Super Heroes* is a great comic book, and one that doesn't deserve the bad reputation it has gained over the years. Please give it a chance. You just might end up being surprised.

Kevin Hawkins
5324 Connell Street
East Ridge, TN 37412

The article wasn't about the *Legion*, but the Legionnaires. That's why it concentrated on the new title. Past issues (CS #2, #6) have explored *Legion* from the perspectives of Paul Levitz and Keith Giffen.

WOLVERINE'S MEMORY PROBLEMS OFTEN GOT HIM INTO UNCOMFORTABLE PREDICAMENTS AS A CHILD...



Art: Kevin Brockschmidt

book whose only claim to fame was the specials included and *Superman*'s temporary (?) death.

I just hope that readers, who also happen to be buyers, realize that they *don't* have to get stepped all over in order to enjoy their hobby. Until we make a stand, all forms of the industry will be able to do as they please to us.

Derrick Fannin
594 Hyden Bridge
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...I am a longtime *Legion of Super Heroes* fan who is writing in reaction to your article on the new *Legion* spin-off, *Legionnaires* (CS #32). While I was very impressed with the good coverage that you gave the new

Think about it, the *X-Men* have many things that you must know and remember to enjoy them: such as four teams split up through five different books, one main team (*X-Men*) that's split up into two different books, with members who cross over from one book to the other to the point that you're not really sure who's a part of which team; a cast of former *X-Men* and *X-Villains* that number into the dozens, villains (like Magneto and The White Queen) who may or may not be dead, loads of major plotlines going through the five books, and of course, the annual crossovers that require that you not miss even one book, otherwise you'll be totally lost. But, for all I

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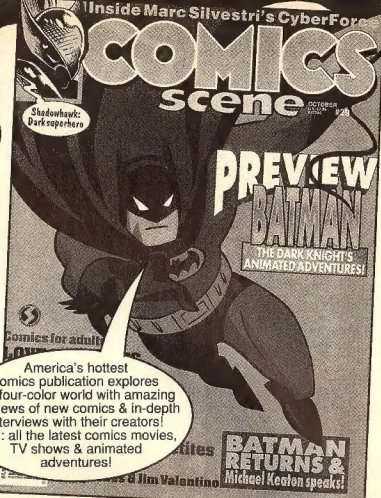
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CRISIS OF INFINITE COMICS

Who will survive? And what will be left of them?



KEVIN BROCKSCHMIDT

Of course, the comics industry has experienced several implosions/market corrections/cutbacks over its history. The biggest was in the early '50s, when most companies were cutting back or going under. Fawcett decided to stop publishing superhero comics rather than try to defend itself from a DC lawsuit (the famed Superman vs. Captain Marvel skirmish) mostly because comics appeared unprofitable, and the publication of Fredric Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* spearheaded a campaign which nearly caused the extinction of most superhero and horror comics publishers. Atlas/Marvel survived the

Not that many years ago, you could go into a store and find a wide assortment of soft drinks. There was only one flavor of Coca-Cola; it was generally sold on a shelf along with all the other brands of soft drinks. Today,

So what does this have to do with comic books, anyway?

Marvel is the 700-pound gorilla of the comics scene. However, their domination of the market is facing its most serious challenge in recent years, with Valiant and Image chipping away at Marvel's market share. Although DC has been hurt the most in recent years by the increasing number of independent publishers, Marvel is also feeling the



SO MANY COMICS, SO LITTLE MONEY



heat. But Marvel is fighting back—and the results could be unfortunate.

You see, Marvel is producing more than 100 monthly comics this year. Think about that for a moment. Only a few years ago, many comic shops barely had the space to display and sell 100 titles each month.

In the past, because Marvel is one of the dominant forces in the field, they've been able to assure prominent shelf space for virtually all of their titles. This year, they're hoping to maintain their control, and expand. But where is all this shelf space going to come from?

What has caused the glut? There are several factors. Certainly the corporate mentality is prevailing—the folks calling the shots at many of the bigger companies are no longer in it for their love of comics, but for the bucks which that product can bring. The accountants hold reign today, and big business now realizes that there's gold in them thar funny books. The Marvel Entertainment Group is traded on the New York Stock Exchange, and must produce profits to keep shareholders happy.

Another cause is the incredible growth in the comics industry, as evi-

denced by the rapid ascent of Image and Valiant, supported by the baby boomlet kids who are coming of comics-reading age.

Make no mistake, this glut cannot be blamed entirely on Marvel. The market would still be flooded, even if Marvel *didn't* expand their regular line at all. Dark Horse is launching a new superhero universe (*Comics' Greatest World*), Malibu is unleashing their *Ultaverse*, Continuity has initiated an ambitious crossover (*Deathwatch 2000*), DC is responding with the Vertigo and Milestone lines, ANIA is trying to become a major player, the oft-rumored Valiant/Image crossover has been scheduled, and Image has even promised to get their books out on schedule. Marvel is trying to take advantage of this perceived increase in demand by adding to its regular line, giving a major push to its U.K. universe and revitalizing Epic with a new group of "Heavy Hitters."

Recently, Marvel had to determine the best strategy to combat the competition. They were faced with a choice. They could either continue to publish a manageable number of (around 60) titles and keep the quality at a high level, or they could put out 100 titles

every month (which would force much of their competition out of the comic shops). They chose the latter strategy.

This isn't as easy as it sounds. Marvel is no longer the first choice of many of comics' most talented creators, for two reasons. Fewer and fewer individual comics are going to sell well enough to earn royalties for their creators, because there are so many more titles to choose from. Even the untouchable X-books have declined in sales. In most cases, issues must sell 100,000 copies to begin paying royalties; fans who have a relatively fixed amount of disposable income will have to spread it all over a wider field. So, creators who work for Marvel are facing the prospect of lower and lower sales for their individual titles, and thus lower (or no) royalties. It may indeed be possible for them to make more money elsewhere.

In addition, Marvel is much more reluctant to promote its "hot" artists and writers nowadays—and who can blame them? If an artist today becomes very popular and develops a large fan following, he may very well get an offer from Image—most likely a lucrative offer that will also entitle him to own his creations. So, Marvel has been

forced into a very unpleasant position—if their creators become too popular, then the House of Ideas could turn into a farm club for Image and other companies. But, if Marvel doesn't promote their creators, those folks aren't going to be very satisfied.

So, Marvel artists and writers are faced with the prospect of diminishing royalties, a lower profile and no creator rights. And, many creators are looking for greener pastures. To fill the holes left by the defection of their established artists and the incredible expansion of their line, Marvel is hiring new talents at an amazing rate. Some of these will undoubtedly be stars of the future—but an alarming number of them are, to use the baseball analogy, being signed up to play in the major leagues out of high school, without going through college or the minors. And, the results are apparent in too many titles. Basic anatomy goes out the window in an attempt to develop Liefeld or Lee clones, resulting in a surplus of tiny heads on enormous bodies, with grossly distorted limbs that defy rationality.

Instead of promoting artists, the editors at Marvel have been encouraged to promote characters. That's why Spider-Man, Punisher or Ghost Rider seem to be in every other Marvel title (even though comics have always been about characters, the rise of the "hot artist as pop star" phenomenon in recent years has proven valid enough for the seven Image creators to found their own highly successful company). Concentrating on characters is a very good strategy—in moderation. Unfortunately, if Wolverine is guest-starring in a dozen different Marvel titles every month, a Wolverine appearance is no longer something special, and the effectiveness of guest-shots is diminished.

Marvel has also joined the other major players in utilizing cover gimmicks, although companies seem to be reassessing as reader resistance to the ploy grows.

If Marvel seems to be taking the majority of hits for the coming Bloodbath, it isn't because the other comics companies are innocents; there's plenty of blame to go around. However, Marvel is the big fish in the pond today, and it's their actions that are helping to create the glut. As unfair as it may sound, however, Marvel has a perfect right to do everything that they're doing. In fact, it can be considered sound business practice. And why not? Marvel Comics is big business.

Some people can look at the coming glut and think, "Hey, here's my big chance to break into comics," or, "Oh, boy, I've got more comics to choose

from than ever!" Enjoy it while you can, because it's not going to last long. Marvel Comics is unlikely to continue publishing titles with embarrassingly low print runs or books that lose money (these are usually one and the same) for long. Instead, they can be expected to continue just long enough to see a number of smaller, more adventurous publishers go out of business, unable to get their product noticed amidst the flood of titles. And, when the little fish are dead or dying, Marvel could trim their line by as much as 40 percent. Many of the new hires will be let go, crawling back to beg for their old day jobs, while Marvel is assured of maintaining dominance.

Can it work? Maybe. It did before. The big companies can afford to put out more books that each sell fewer copies because they can make it up in total volume. Despite having to pay artists and writers, Marvel may be better off selling 50,000 copies each of 100 different titles than 200,000 copies of 20 books. The cheaper the books are to produce, the greater Marvel's profit (even if some royalties are paid), and by producing high-priced reprints on expensive paper, the biggest costs are printing and paper (that's why additional reprint titles are usually a pretty good indication of a coming glut). In the '80s, dozens of small publishers—most of whom published small lines of black-and-white titles with widely varying quality—went out of business. The big companies cut back on their expansion, and the reprints (and lower-selling titles) disappeared.

The market is quite different today, however, and history may not be as quick to repeat itself. There are many more powerful players today than in the early '80s. Former Marvel maniacs are now fervent supporters of Image and Valiant. Many people today compare Marvel's current operation to DC Comics in the '60s—fat, lazy and ready to be knocked off by a crafty, hip interloper more in tune with kids today (Stan Lee used to delight in Marvel's second-place status, gleefully comparing themselves to "a little dog nipping at the heels" of the huge, stodgy DC—well after Marvel had become #1). Fans may not be as quick to give up the latest issue of *Spawn* or *Magnus* to buy yet another X-book or Spider-title.

There is still a possibility that every publisher out there this summer will make lots of money, get rich and expand their lines even further. But don't count on it. There simply aren't enough people spending enough money on enough comics to let it happen. The comics shops stand to be hit hard by the cash flow crunch. Smaller retailers who have to buy the Marvel, DC, Image and Valiant titles that they know will sell will not have enough



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money to order *all* of the books they would like, most of which will be from the newer, smaller, more experimental publishers. The recent recession was probably responsible for closing some comics stores and increasing accounts receivable at distributors. Some shops are cutting out marginal product in order to protect their bottom line. In the past, books could languish on shelves for a week or more with no problem. Now, books that come in on Thursday night must be sold by Friday, or the managers may not have enough free cash to pay the electric bill and rent.

Who is likely to survive the summer intact? Who has the most to lose? And who will be the casualties of this Bloodbath?

The smallest publishers are going to be up against the ropes, fighting for every inch of rack space—if they aren't displayed on the shelves, they aren't going to sell many copies. This is the biggest tragedy of the glut, because some of the smallest



publishers produce some of the most exciting, innovative comics, rather than the standard superhero fare. Some of them will survive very well because they've had the chance to develop devoted followings. Dave Sim looks very likely to reach *Cerebus* #300, and the Pinis have a very loyal *Elfquest* audience. A *Distant Soil* may not get the shelf space of an X-book, but its followers make an effort to pre-order each issue from their comics shops.

Comics that appeal to younger readers have an extra edge, and should not be affected quite as badly. Archie's greatest strength is newsstand sales, and the greatest audience for the Disney and Harvey reprint comics is probably on newsstands, no matter who's publishing them. Unfortunately, newsstands are an endangered species; there are fewer and fewer of them each year. Most young readers are introduced to comics via newsstands. Without these traditional outlets, can comics shops alone provide potential readers with the introduction to the medium that will be necessary for the

form to survive the next decade?

Some comics publishers have been forced to diversify after releasing high-quality, low-selling comics. Eclipse now seems to function largely as a trading card company (though they're making another attempt at comics with their Claypool Comics imprint), while Kitchen Sink and Fantagraphics provide a valuable service by reprinting classic comic strips in durable formats, while also publishing serious alternative comix. Both Kitchen Sink and Fantagraphics have had success with a specific kind of direct sales—issuing their own catalogs for direct mail sales to readers on their mailing lists.

Other small publishers have their work cut out for them. Comico, Fantaco, Fleetway, Harris, Heroic, Innovation, Millennium, New England, Night Wynd, Now, Parody Press, Personality, Revolutionary, Russ Cochran, Slave Labor, Topps, Viz and others will, in varying degrees, have to fight for their survival.

In general, the older, more established companies and the more spe-

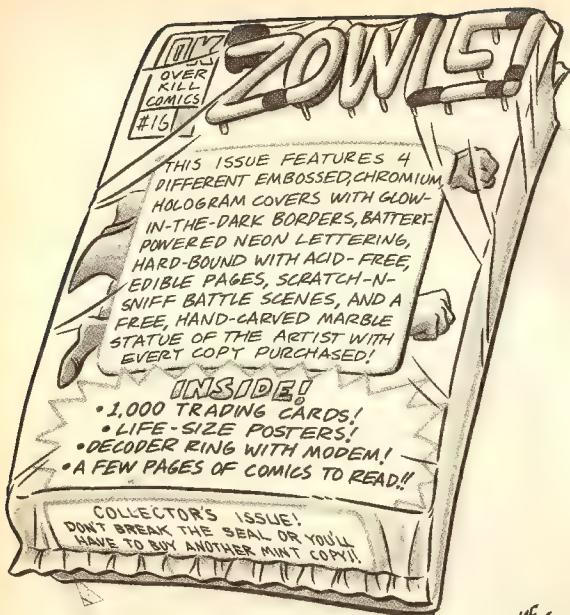
cialized publications probably stand a better chance than new publishers trying to do superheroes, but anything can happen. Topps is relying on veteran creators and the King of Comics for their new Kirby books. Kevin Eastman's Tundra has turned out a series of critically acclaimed titles, but that success hasn't always been reflected in sales. The company has now merged with Kitchen Sink, creating a single stronger publisher. Fantagraphics has a small devoted following willing to seek out unusual titles like *Eightball* or *Hate*, but potential readers may have a harder time maintaining their interest if they have to pre-order every issue or search from comics shop to comics shop.

Traditional mainstream bookstores are not the answer, though some publishers have indeed made inroads into this area with graphic novels and collections.

Of the bigger publishers, DC seems the surest candidate to weather the storm, although that doesn't necessarily have anything to do with their comics. DC is owned by Time-Warner—which is its greatest strength and biggest weakness. As long as there are Batman Colorforms or Swamp Thing lunch boxes, there will always be a DC Comics—if only to protect licensing properties. Unfortunately, this also means that any major development in the lives of DC Comics characters must be approved by corporate executives. Costumes and alter-egos can't be changed without consultation.

DC's market share will certainly dip early this summer, though it doesn't necessarily mean their readership is down. Their slice of the pie may look smaller, but it's a bigger pie, and DC Comics will be poised to move in when other publishers pull back.

The *Superman* #75 phenomenon is history now, but the new *Supermen* will ensure that interest (or curiosity) continues for a while (with initial big sales)—and when it drops off, most fans won't be surprised to see Kal-El flying back. The Batman titles are also maintaining interest as the countdown to *Batman* #500 continues, with the much-rumored Big Event in that issue. DC's biggest victories this year may come with their two new lines. Expectations are very high for Vertigo, and the quality seems to be there in their initial releases, but translating quality into sales may be more difficult—the Vertigo audience is older and without the speculation mentality. Many fans seem to have overlooked the Milestone titles, but their initial releases are very impressive; the Milestone comics have the potential to take everyone by surprise. Even if DC



Layout & Design: Len H. Leake

doesn't chalk up further spectacular wins this summer, they're still going to be around next summer—and in a year like this one, that will be an accomplishment.

Valiant is the biggest question mark of the industry. Up to this point, Valiant has made its mark with low print runs, gimmicks and a perceived investment potential. Nowadays, their print runs aren't low, fans are becoming bored (and even hostile) toward gimmicks, and slowly but surely, would-be speculators are discovering that they can't sell their back issues at wildly inflated prices. Magical price guides listing the "10 Hottest Comics" of the month at prices which have no basis in reality (if you're skeptical, head to your friendly neighborhood comics shop and try to sell a few comics at those prices) may well cause a backlash. How badly will this hurt Valiant? It depends on whether fans have been buying Valiants for their stories or their collectibility. Certainly, Valiant has the most to lose if the bottom drops out of the speculation market, but if they can maintain their books' quality, and their owners don't give in to the temptation of quick, easy money, they'll be around for a while.

Image is another animal all together, and frankly, it's difficult to discuss Image as a single comics company. They've taken countless hits for missing shipping dates (most of them justified), though if each issue sells half a million copies, retailers are just going to grin and sell it. But, when sales go down, it's simply not going to be tolerated. The founding members of Image realize that, and have pledged to produce their books on time, but the burden of proof is on them. The Image line is expanding quite a bit this year, as well, and some of these books may not sell like *Spawn* #1. The Image imprint used to guarantee multiple sales, but the day is coming fast when the Image zombies will become a little more discriminating. Fans have short memories, and even if the Image imprint will guarantee shelf space for a long time to come, fans will eventually give up if they can't ship on schedule. Todd McFarlane (who has proven he can produce a monthly series) will be around with *Spawn* for as long as he cares to be, whether or not it's under the Image banner, but the skeptical eyes of comicdom will be on the other Image books for a long, long time.

Malibu has tried to put a brave face

on the departure of the Image creators, but in addition to bringing in a huge chunk of change, it gave them additional prestige and credibility. Malibu's new *Ultraverse* may have a difficult fight ahead. Even though the superhero line involves some very established and talented creators, they're not exactly "hot," and introducing an entirely new line is risky at any time, no matter who's releasing them (the New Universe and Impact comics are two examples that spring to mind immediately). Unfortunately, quality is no guarantee of high sales, and as good as some of these books appear, Malibu has an uphill battle to survive the Bloodbath.

Continuity likewise has its work cut out for it. Neal Adams is still highly respected by older fans, but it's his pencils, not his name, that sells comic books. Combined with a lack of name artists and late ship dates they've promised to avoid (*Ms. Mystic* was the *Youngblood* of the '80s), prospects for their success appear bleaker.

Dark Horse is likewise launching a new superhero line in a 16-issue miniseries, with ongoing series to follow. The quality is also here, but again, quality isn't the issue. The biggest advantage of *Comics' Greatest World*, the way to make sure they'll stand out, may be their one-dollar price tag. Customers who receive a dollar back from their purchases—no longer enough to buy most comics—may decide to gamble on a Dark Horse superhero instead of a pack of trading cards. And if they like what they see, they just may come back. Dark Horse's other titles, particularly their licensed books, continue to sell respectably, and their foreign distribution system is the envy of many independents. Dark Horse is likely to retain their #5 position for the near future—unless they are unseated by a newcomer.

This is one of the worst times ever to launch a new comics company, and any publisher trying to get started this summer is almost assured of failure. If Jim Shooter didn't have such an established track record, Defiant Comics could be easily dismissed. But, Shooter is the man who headed Marvel during some of its biggest years, and he was instrumental in Valiant's creation. Shooter has proven he can launch a brand new company, and if Shooter has learned from his business experiences at Valiant, Defiant could be the next big thing.

Marvel appears to be in the best position to survive the whole glut, but ironically, they may wind up being the biggest losers. When you're *numero uno*, there's only one place you can go,

(continued on page 66)

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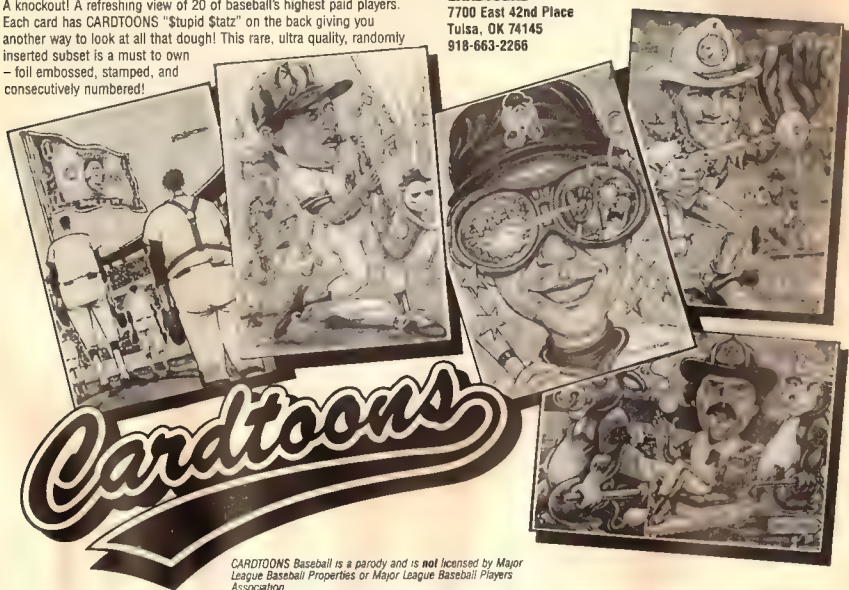
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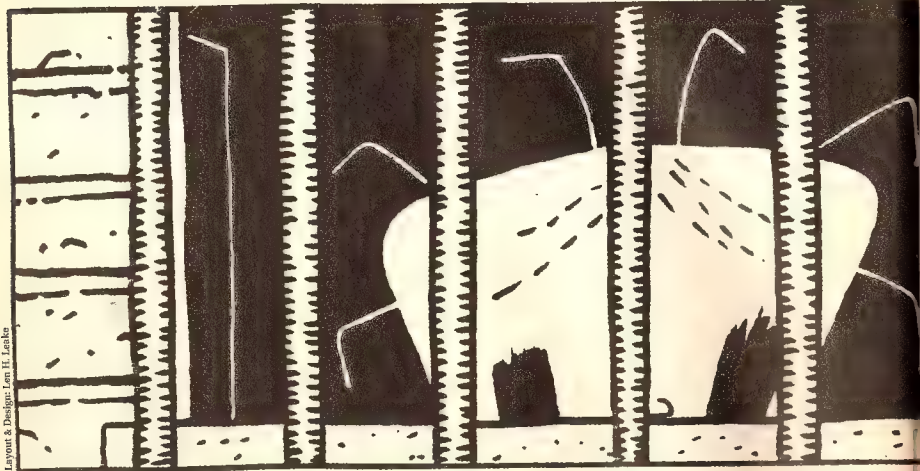
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charlie brown in the bi



Layout & Design: Len H. Leiber

It's about a kid in an asylum, for Pete's sake.

Gregory is a mutant, and he's a lot like you. A big-headed kid in a straitjacket who gleefully resides in a cement cell, Gregory first appeared in *Honk* magazine and went on to star in 1989's cleverly-titled *Gregory*. As the back cover blurb tactfully put it, "He speaks mainly in vowels."

Poor social skills haven't prevented our young hero from amassing a full gallery of friends: The light bulb, the walls and tiny critters who live with—

and sometimes *on*—Gregory. Chief among these is Herman Vermin, a slick but publicity-starved rat who played large in last year's *Gregory II: Herman Vermin's Very Own Best-Selling & Critically Acclaimed Book with Gregory in it*. The rat is everything Gregory isn't: Verbose, quasi-adult and usually dead at the end of any given story.

"Actually, I invented Gregory first to satisfy a story idea, someone to inhabit the story 'It's Spring,' which I did

as a one-shot throwaway," creator Marc Hempel says. "At that point, Gregory looked much different and wasn't even really a character. Then after I did more stories with him, I came up with the idea to let Gregory have an imaginary friend who would show up and then get killed right away. That was Herman, and that was the first Herman story in book one.

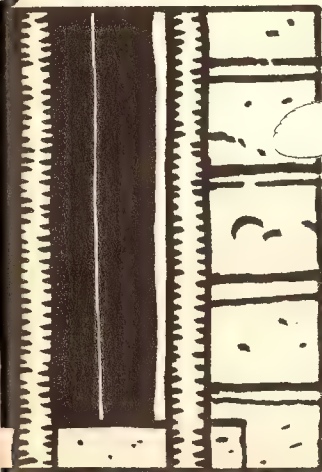
"I hadn't intended on bringing Herman back—any more than I had intended bringing Gregory back, for that matter—but I liked him so much that I had to figure out some kind of strategy to have him keep coming back. And of course, I left in the part about his getting killed all the time, because I felt that was an appealing aspect of his personality."

The strip's other most frequent character is a small white mouse named Wendell. Another cell might seem crowded by the time a sidekick was introduced for the hero's sidekick, but the three characters don't conflict. "When Herman came back, he brought Wendell with him. I still haven't figured out why," confesses Hempel. "He's another child to play off Her-



In *Gregory II: Herman Vermin's Very Own Best-Selling & Critically Acclaimed Book with Gregory in it*, Gregory's ever-reincarnated sidekick rat attempts an autobiography with Wendell's help and death with Gregory's.

g house

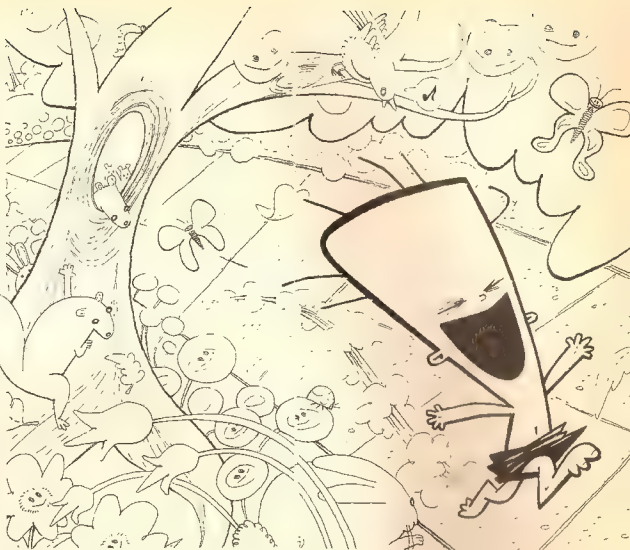


By PETER ORR

man's more adult character. So, I guess it works in that respect. It just makes it easier for Herman to relate to a childlike character who's smaller than he is, someone he can boss around. He can't really boss Gregory around."

Now *Gregory III* has arrived. The collection's final piece, "Out," flexes Hempel's style so deftly that the reader barely notices cruising through a 32-page story with *not* a word of dialogue. Gregory manages to escape his concrete pen, and takes a big journey out to the sidewalk. As Gregory's point-of-view shifts at the strange world around him, Hempel's pen adapts to show the kid's joy and terror.

"It's a story very definitely about perception, and how our fears can color our perception of reality," the artist says. "Speaking of color, that story was originally supposed to be in color. The color sequences were when Gregory's looking out the window or looking out the door. His fantasy version of what the outside is, with the bunny rabbits and the flowers and stuff—that was going to be in full color. And when the leaf floats through the crack in the door, the entire page is



Bunnies and flowers and birdies—oh my! Gregory's trip to the fantasy side of reality was supposed to be in color "but some compromises you have to accept."

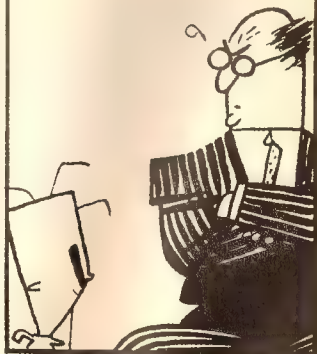
in black and white. You just see that one leaf in color.

"*Gregory III* is a black-and-white book, basically because DC wouldn't let me do a color book," he explains, not complaining, "even though they would've only upped the price about a buck or so. So, I'm a little disappointed with that, but some compromises you have to accept. Graphitti Designs is planning a hardcover *Gregory* collection, so we'll try to do it in color for that. It still works in black and white. I would have been sunk otherwise. Personally, I don't think much of the emotional power is lost."

Most *Gregory* stories concern point-of-view in one way or another. The 36-year-old Hempel, noted for his collaboration on *Breathalyzer* (CS #15) with Insight Studios partner Mark Wheatley, admits drawing *Gregory's* inspiration from life. "I put everything I have into *Gregory*, in terms of creative energy, concepts and emotional experiences," he says. "When I'm drawing a dramatic book, the expression's still there, but it's not as goofy."

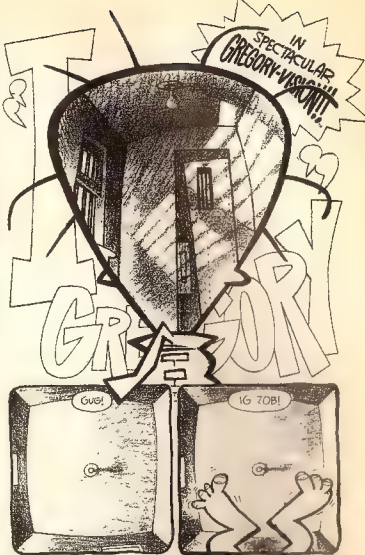
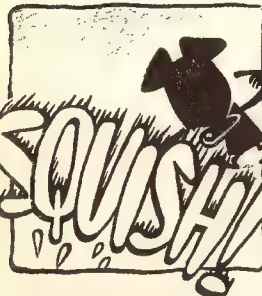
Pensive though articulate, Hempel makes quite a few jokes, but doesn't laugh much. He takes his Inkpot Award-winning invention seriously, as he does the inclusion of Piranha's "For Mature Readers" advisory on the book's cover. Such labels rarely deter

A special addition to *Gregory III* is the "Mr. Terwilliger Show," about "a totally normal" inmate who wants Gregory to stop looking at him.



underage readers, though. "No, they want it all the more," Hempel half-jokes. "It's like, 'It's forbidden, so I want to go see it. Whatever it is my parents don't want me to see.' And there are many so-called adults-only

Cartoony in look, *Gregory* is filled with "real ideas, real concepts, in addition to some full-frontal rat nudity—things small children might be frightened by."



"I put everything I have into *Gregory*, in terms of creative energy, concepts and emotional experiences," Hempel says.

He's not naming names or being a curmudgeon. But while he confesses to enjoying "exactly the comics you would expect I read," like *Yummy Fur* and *Drawn & Quarterly*, Hempel grinds his teeth while surveying most of what the market offers today.

"I look at many other comics, humor or whatever, and it always looks kind of dashed-out. I can see the potential for the material that the person *isn't* realizing," he explains. "I wonder how much time they put into it. It's the same with a film, anything. When you say, 'They really could have done something with that,' it's really kind of sad. That's what I object to: When comics are poorly written and drawn. If the people creating these things don't have a clue, that's when I really lose my temper."

Typically, artists who talk like this speak partly out of jealousy; they're ticked that someone else gets to goof off all the time. You create something this unique *only* through endless labor. The deceptive simplicity of Hempel's style reflects his constant pruning and planning of the story before he actually draws them.

"The material starting with *Gregory* II I wrote especially carefully, because I had that three-year period to work on it," he says. "I wasn't writing it full-time for three years, but I came back to it, and had time to come up with different ideas and try them, and throw

out what didn't work. So, it's very well-honed. By the time I go to the drawing board, I'm 100 percent certain that this is what I *want* on the page. I think I end up with stronger material for having worked on it for so many months.

"I'm making *Gregory* the best I can make it now," he attests. "It's possible I could make it better, but not probable. I put everything I have into it in terms of ideas and emotion, chunks of my life and personality."

The three-year gap between the first and second installments encompassed a big leap forward in both Hempel's writing and his art. Out of that period came *Breathaker*



"I hadn't intended on bringing Herman back," Hempel says of *Gregory*'s seemingly immortal sidekick.

and *The Super Image Catalog*, a dead-on photographic parody of a popular mail-order catalog created with longtime STARLOG illustrator George Kochell, that still hasn't been released despite its hysterical reputation among those who've seen it. This and much other work has led to Hempel's upcoming assignment on *Sandman* with Neil Gaiman. "I'll be doing five or six issues," Hempel reveals, "and no, I won't be using my *Gregory* style."

That he has a separate style for his cell-bound pal offers another key to how Hempel creates. The subject matter requires a personal approach because of where Hempel mines it from. That might seem clearer when we see *Gregory IV* this October, a 64-page graphic novel that takes *Gregory* out of the asylum and plants him in the loving mitts of a foster family.

"They end up being far more dysfunctional than *Gregory* ever was, and he goes on to heal them rather than vice versa," Hempel says. "It's ironic, almost, and also very poignant in that it draws from many of my early childhood experiences. Family life and stuff like that. I'm dredging up a lot of junk from my early life."

Many writers will sacrifice a thumb before admitting that their protagonist represents its creator. Hempel doesn't sound like denying this ever crossed his mind.

(continued on page 64)

CONTINUING THE SAGA!

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In his suburban Midwest home, the star of one of the summer's biggest movies is unwinding after a busy day at school. And now he has agreed to his first interview ever. Seven-year-old Mason Gamble has just rushed home from school in time to meet the press, and his parents, Tim and Sally, have a camcorder ready to record this bit of family history occurring in their living room.

After an extensive talent hunt, the Chicago-area native was selected for the title role in John Hughes' movie version of Hank Ketchum's *Dennis the Menace*, which also features Christopher Lloyd, Lea Thompson and Walter Matthau as Mr. Wilson. Gamble, who was six when *Dennis* was filmed last year, is bright, playful and articulate beyond his years—cute without the negative connotations of the word. After making sure the camcorder is running, Mason Gamble does something that no interviewee has ever done in more than a decade of entertainment journalism—he climbs into my lap and begins the interview by inspecting my tape recorder and commandeering the microphone.

MASON GAMBLE: Is this the microphone? Where's the speaker?

COMICS SCENE: No, you're not going to hear anything out of that. How did you get involved in the movie?

GAMBLE: Well, first of all, I got called in for an audition. Then, there were a few more, and then at the last audition, I got picked out of 20,000.

CS: They didn't have all 20,000 there at that last audition, did they?

GAMBLE: [Rolling his eyes] No. They voted it down to 20, and then all of a sudden, a few days later, I got called and they said, "You've got the job."

CS: Had you done commercials or any other acting before?

GAMBLE: Yeah, about five, six or seven commercials—Wheaties, one for Pepsi with me and my dad in it, my real dad.

CS: What did they have you do to audition for the *Dennis* job?

GAMBLE: [Fidgeting with microphone] Well...

CS: I can hold that if you want me to...

GAMBLE: [Firmly] No. First, I had to go into my agent's office and do stuff, and for some reason, I brought a worm.

CS: You brought a live worm?

GAMBLE: [Laughs] For some reason, yeah. It was in my pocket, covered up, and when I reached in my pocket, it was like this *[demonstrates]* worm while *[wriggling on lap]* it was all dry, but when I pulled it out, it was like *[spiggling around]*.

CS: When did you meet John Hughes?

GAMBLE: [After parental prompting] John was at the last audition. He asked



Meet the Menace

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

Mason Gamble, the screen's newest Dennis, is seven years old. And this is his first interview—with anyone.

All Dennis Photos: © Three W Studios/art. Copyright 1991 Watline, Inc.

Mason Gamble is the menace to Dad and Mom Mitchell (Robert Stanton and Lea Thompson) and, of course, the Wilsons (Joan Plowright and Walter Matthau).



Layout & Design: Yvonne Jang

to me a little. There were a bunch of news guys who talked to us and watched how we reacted.

CS: Did you know how to read then?

GAMBLE: *[Candidly]* No. Well, a little.

CS: What did you think when you found out you had the job?

GAMBLE: *[Animated]* I was shocked! It was like, 20,000. I was like, "No way, man!" Then, all of a sudden, I got this call and *[stiffens his body and clutches his throat, then laughs]*.

CS: So, you get the job, and you're ready to start filming. But you don't know how to read, so you don't know your lines. How did you work it out?

GAMBLE: My parents taught me 'em. After a few times, I got 'em ZIP! down. No problema, dude!

CS: Do you remember the first scene you had to work on?

GAMBLE: My mom in the movie dragged me to *[ominously]* Margaret's house. I was paralyzed when she

dragged me. *[He suddenly stiffens, freezes motionless for a few seconds, then collapses laughing.]*

CS: Is that how you did it in the movie?

GAMBLE: Yeah, she had my arms up like this *[demonstrates]* and she was just pulling me.

CS: Why did you have to go to Margaret's house?

GAMBLE: Cause that was the only person who would babysit me. Yucky! Joey was there at Margaret's house *[blows directly into microphone and tugs on the cord]*.

CS: Lea Thompson played your mom. What was she like—was she nice, was she helpful to you?

GAMBLE: *[Giggling]* Yeah, yeah, yes, yes, yes!

CS: And the second scene you shot was when you shot an aspirin into Mr. Wilson's mouth.

GAMBLE: I had this big slingshot

carved from a tree. I was aiming perfect, because I thought he was sick. He was sleeping, and all of a sudden, when he was yawning and his mouth was open—*whammo!*

CS: You didn't really shoot one into his mouth with a slingshot, did you?

GAMBLE: *[Gesturing wide with both hands, making it difficult to obtain an accurate transcription later, as he holds the microphone in one hand]* No, it was a humongous, gigantic mouth. Fake.

CS: So, it was a big take one that you had to pretend was Mr. Wilson's mouth. Walter Matthau was Mr. Wilson. Did you know who he was before you made the movie? Had you seen any of his movies?

GAMBLE: Once, *Bad News Bears*.

CS: So you knew who he was.

GAMBLE: Right, and I knew who Christopher Lloyd was, and I knew who Joan *[Plowright, who plays Mrs.*

Wilson] was, but I didn't know who my parents were. I didn't know Lea.

CS: Were you nervous about meeting anybody? Were you nervous about meeting Walter?

GAMBLE: Ummm...yeah.

CS: He's probably kind of grumpy in the movie, isn't he?

GAMBLE: Yeah. *[Suddenly, goes into a Matthau impression]. I hate that kid!*

CS: What was he like in real life?

GAMBLE: He was nice, and a comedian. He gave me his joke book. It's up in my room.

CS: Did you have a favorite co-star?

GAMBLE: *[Tugging on the mike cable]* Yeah. Nick [Castle]. The director.

CS: How did he help you?

GAMBLE: Lemme see...that's hard. I don't think he really did!

CS: Which scene was the most fun?

GAMBLE: The treehouse scene. That was where I met Switchblade Sam. Christopher Lloyd. We were climbing up into the treehouse that we built. Well, we didn't really build it—it was already built, but it was old and all torn up, and we fixed it up in the movie. When we were climbing up one day, he was sitting in the corner and *[distastefully]* smoking a cigarette.

CS: Was he trying to scare you?

GAMBLE: No, he was trying to make us tell where a bunch of money was. He's a robber!

CS: Did you know who Dennis the Menace was before you auditioned? *[Nods]* Had you read any of the comic books or seen the TV shows?

GAMBLE: Yep, you bet!

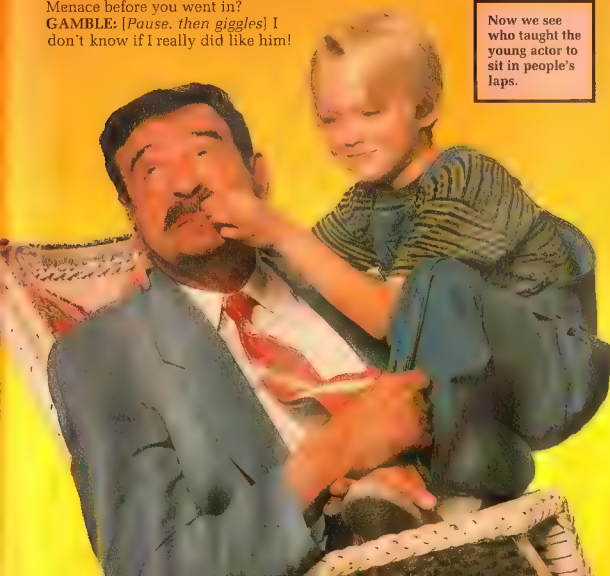
CS: What did you think of Dennis the Menace before you went in?

GAMBLE: *[Pause, then giggles]* I don't know if I really did like him!



Gamble may not get in trouble often, but Dennis is always up to something.

Now we see who taught the young actor to sit in people's laps.



CS: Are you like Dennis in real life? Do you get in trouble very much?

GAMBLE: Yeah!

CS: What's the last thing you got in trouble for?

GAMBLE: Ummm... I think that was last year. *[His father corrects him]* Oh, yeah, last night! I missed the school bus! I was playing, and it drove away. I had to call my mom. At first I called the operator, but she couldn't help me. I wasn't getting through.

CS: Because you didn't have any money?

GAMBLE: *[Annoyed, but tolerant]* No! The school phone isn't a pay phone.

CS: But anyway, you got home.

GAMBLE: *[Heaves a sigh]* Yes.

CS: What do all of your school friends think about you being Dennis?

GAMBLE: They're jealous, and at lunch they give me all their food. No, really, they think I'm a movie star!

CS: Well, you will be a movie star when Dennis the Menace comes out.

GAMBLE: No, I won't. Macaulay Culkin is a movie star, but *not* me. I'm just an actor.

CS: Yeah, but you're starring in a movie.

GAMBLE: Well, it doesn't make me a movie star. I think five more movies that I star in and I'll be a movie star.

CS: Who's your favorite actor?



Kellen Hathaway, Amy Sakasitz and Gamble are the kids on the block; Joey, Dennis' best friend; Margaret, a girl; and the menace himself.

GAMBLE: That's hard. I don't think I—I would have to say Macaulay Culkin.

CS: What are your favorite movies and TV shows? Do you watch much TV?

GAMBLE: Actually, no, only on weekend nights, because of school. [Father explains the TV rules and prompts him.] *The Simpsons*; *America's Funniest Videos* and *America's Funniest People*; Dr. Quinn, *Medicine Woman*.

CS: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

GAMBLE: One sister and she's nine, Casey.

CS: What does Casey think about your movie?

GAMBLE: Sometimes she gets whiny, because she wanted to be a movie star first. [Gamble has begun pointing the mike at CS for questions, and speaking directly into the mike for his own answers.]

CS: That's good, now you're getting it—you point it at me like that, and then trade off. Do you read comic books or anything?

GAMBLE: Yep! I've got three. One is *X-Men*.

CS: No *Dennis the Menace* comics?

GAMBLE: Not yet! Well, one—two!

CS: Did the man who draws *Dennis* ever come to the set?

GAMBLE: He did. [Loudly] Hank Ketcham! You should see how fast he draws *Dennis the Menace*! [Demonstrates with his hands]

CS: Did he draw one for you?

GAMBLE: Yep! And he gave it to me.

CS: Where is it now?

GAMBLE: [Annoyed] I don't know! Mom, do you know where it is?

[Mother reminds him] It's in my room.

CS: What did you do on the set when you didn't actually have to film, besides going to school?

GAMBLE: Recess! I played tag with my stand-ins. Oh, yeah, I made a fort out of cardboard boxes. Did anybody ever

tell you that you look like John Hughes?

CS: No, nobody ever told me that.

GAMBLE: You do! You look like him. He's a nice guy. He likes kids.

CS: Was he on the set very often?

GAMBLE: Yeah, he was pretty much there every day. Well, not every day...

CS: What was his job?

GAMBLE: He was the producer and he wrote the script. The whole script, everybody's lines, everything.

CS: Did you work with him at all? Did he change lines on you?

GAMBLE: Yeah. Sometimes they had to cut out scenes, so he had to change the lines. Sometimes he didn't like the lines.

CS: How did you learn your lines?

GAMBLE: Well, they just kept reading them to me, and then, when I tried doing them, they were easy. I would snap get 'em!

CS: So, you're a quick study?

GAMBLE: [Annoyed] Do we have to go back to that? [Laughs]

CS: You're an impatient one, aren't you? What are you going to do when you're on David Letterman's lap, and he asks you the same question twice?

GAMBLE: Run!

CS: Do you want to take a break for a couple of minutes or so?

GAMBLE: Your choice!

CS: OK, let's take a break.

GAMBLE: OK. [Examining the tape recorder] Where's the stop? Where's the stop?

Mason finds the "stop" button and shuts off the tape recorder, climbs down from my lap and runs over to the video camera. His father helps him frame and focus the shots, and Mason takes a keen interest in the camera's workings. After Mason makes certain the camera is picking up the interview, he climbs back onto my lap. After explaining that his father has had the camcorder for about a year, he grabs the mike again and announces that

he's ready to continue the interview.

GAMBLE: I'm gonna ask my dad if, after I'm done with this, I can take it [the camcorder] outside and shoot.

CS: Do you want to direct when you grow up?

GAMBLE: Nope!

CS: You only want to work a camera when you're around here?

GAMBLE: Yeah, because only here I know how to work it. The only good thing about this [camera] is, you can get real close if you're shooting a bird, so if I'm like, standing five feet away from it, I can make it look like I'm only standing two.

CS: You must have learned a lot during this movie's making.

GAMBLE: Yeah. It's pretty tricky. I learned how to tie three knots.

CS: What kind did they teach you?

GAMBLE: One was kind of a slip knot, but not a slip knot—it was a different slip knot. The other one, I forget what the name of it was.

CS: Let me ask you about some of the other people you worked with. What was Joan like?

GAMBLE: Joan Plowright. Well, she was a nice lady. And her and Walter would make a perfect couple!

CS: How about Lea? Was she nice?

GAMBLE: Lea Thompson? Ahh...she was nice. She was always saying [imitating], "Oh, you better stay away from that, Mason!" and, "Watch out! Look out, Mason!"

CS: Was she kind of acting like your mother off camera?

GAMBLE: [Laughs.] Yeah. She was my bodyguard!

CS: Was there anything about Walter Matthau that you didn't mention? What do you think when you think of him?

GAMBLE: I think about jokes. He taught me how to act. He told me just to be myself and listen to the other actors. He's like my Grandpa Bob. He's funny, and he does that "I got your nose" joke, too.

CS: Have you heard from Walter since you finished with the movie?

GAMBLE: Yeah, twice I got a letter from him.

CS: What did he have to say? Does he miss you?

GAMBLE: Uh-huh! I forgot what it says, you'll have to go get the letter. [His mother reminds him that Matthau told him about his new film] Oh, yeah. It's called *Grumpy Old Men*.

CS: He's not a grumpy old man in real life, is he?

GAMBLE: Yes, he is. [Laughs] No, he is not. He's not grumpy, he's bumpy. No. Actually, he's grumpy, grumpy, grumpy. He's super-grumpy.

CS: Did you know very much about acting before you started *Dennis*?

GAMBLE: No. A little.

(continued on page 67)

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NEW ELVES FOR OLD

As the "Elfquest" continues, Wendy & Richard Pini admit the obvious: "We do cute elves!"

By DREW BITTNER

Elves. Wolves. Two moons. Beauty and ugliness, love and hate, courage and fear. *Elfquest*.

This year marks the 15th anniversary of the unusual fantasy comic. Amid a blitzkrieg tour of conventions and comic-signing sessions, co-creators Richard and Wendy Pini explain that this is exactly the right time for their company's next step: expansion.

"Last year, we decided it was time to break out and let other people play in our sandbox," Richard Pini says. "We started another title. *New Blood*, under our editorial overview; this book is a fertilizing ground for new talent, and strengthens what we see as an aggressive program of world-building and expansion."

New Blood has already been released as a summer special, with stories by John Byrne, Barry Blair and others. The current *Elfquest* title, *Hidden Years*, is being scripted by Sarah Byam, best known for her work on *Billi 99*, *Captain Atom* and *Black Canary* (CS #31). Paul Abrams and Charles Barnett will be handling art chores. Wendy Pini plots and edits the title, while Richard Pini edits the other projects.

"In addition to *Hidden Years* and *New Blood*, we're going to be publishing *Blood of Ten Chiefs*, where we'll do adaptations of the prose short stories that Tor Books released in paperback, and we have a deal to publish more trade paperback stories as well. Toward the year's end, we'll publish a fourth title, *WaveDancers*. This is the story of a tribe of elves that splintered off from the main group early on in their history and went under the sea, as it were; it's written by Julie Ditrich



In the future is a look into the world of *WaveDancers*, the water-hound elves.

and Bruce Love, with art by Josef Szekeres. There'll be some crossover between the major *Elfquest* characters and the *WaveDancers*.

"There are other titles in the beginning phases," he continues. "One of these takes the world of these adventures far into the future, where the distant descendants of our current heroes go and have adventures in completely new settings. Around the office, we think of it as '*Elfquest: The Next Generation*.' And, just as we've been doing all along, we'll be taking bunches of stories and recycling them into graphic novel collections."

One such collection will incorporate four stories written by Byam

which feature Rayek, Cutter's rival for the affections of the Sun Elf healer Leetah. "Each chapter involves Rayek, who's both a sort of hero and villain," explains Richard. "The first couple of stories show a distant, direct ancestor of Rayek's, a High One who's very much like him in attitude and personality. Then, we show Rayek in the near-past, and see how he got to be the arrogant SOB that he is. The fifth one is a surprise."

Wendy Pini says that it's strange to be overseeing others' *Elfquest* instead of doing it herself.

"My career has changed," she says.



Adapting short stories into comics becomes *Blood of Ten Chiefs*, another addition to the *Elfquest* lineup.

"I've been the artist and co-creator, now I'm the story editor and artistic director, working with Sarah Byam, Charles Barnett, Paul Abrams, Paty Cockrum. I have a wonderful team. They're drawing *Elfquest* on a bi-monthly basis, and we hope to go monthly as soon as we can.

"I sometimes feel like a spider in its web, being in the middle of all this work going on," she continues. "It's still challenging, even after 15 years, because we're going in so many new directions, and I have new responsibilities. Our universe has opened up; by putting out more titles and using new creative people, there

are fresh perceptions coming in, and reflecting our universe back at us in ways we've never seen. Now, instead of inventing *Elfquest*, my job is to protect and defend what *Elfquest* is. If our writers and artists want to put the characters through some event, I have to be the judge. How do you define what works as an *EQ* story? In our case, we go with our gut feelings. My goal is to be the keeper of the flame."

"We know [*Elfquest*] instinctively," Richard states. "It's permeated us to the point where we don't need to think about it. *Elfquest* is a part of us."

One way that the Pini try to keep things fresh is to continually explore

new territory with their gang of wide-eyed Wolfriders. Not only physical landscapes, but internal ones as well.

"Just in aspects of time, in our 'Kings of the Broken Wheel' story, many of our major characters, including Cutter himself, aged 500 years," Wendy explains. "Changes have taken place, both large and small. That age factor has given them new depth, not to mention a new locale and time-frame, because we moved them from primitive to medieval times. That has had the effect of opening up the *Elfquest* universe to time and space travel, which is something we'll be playing with in the future."

"We all do have troubles and struggles," Richard adds. "The characters develop, overcome their problems and find new ones."

"It's a kind of cycle," Wendy says. "I'm actually seeing a return to innocence, because so much time has passed, they've forgotten the troubles they faced in the first few stories. Those are all ancient history."

"If you lived 500 years, you wouldn't remember everything that happened way back when," he says. "The elves let go of the past and don't care much about the future; they live in the present, day to day, and don't worry the way we humans do."

"Cutter's the exception, an aberration, but that makes him interesting," she adds.

The natural culmination of this cycle, as Wendy Pini sees it, is a sort of "*Elfquest* Gotterdammerung," wherein the fates of the primary characters are resolved.

"Some of them have very definite destinies," she says. "I'm playing with it in the back of my mind; the destinies of these characters will get done, and it'll be my final statement about what I feel certain characters were about. And even when we get to that point, the stories will still be going."

Wendy Pini admits that fandom in general may have developed a narrow perspective of her abilities, based on her nearly-exclusive work in the pages of *Elfquest*, but her outside projects showcase entirely different artistic techniques. "I've led a charmed life in this industry," she says. "Every project I've had my heart set on, I've been able to do, including an issue of *Jonny Quest*, as well as *Beauty & the Beast* [which she discussed in CS#7]. I had a lot of convincing to do before [series creator] Ron Koslow gave his blessing to that project. I'm very honored that he saw my scripts as TV scripts and not comics—he accepted them basically as episodes of his show.

"In comics, women are in the minority, and I'm sometimes seen as an



"It's still challenging to do *Elfquest*," notes Wendy Pini.

Art: Wendy Pini

artist who *only* does elves and cutesy stuff. That "doesn't bother me. I do other projects, to stretch. There are things I'm out of practice with, but I do get outside *Elfquest* from time to time."

Her next project, for *New Blood*, will be a team-up with John Byrne. He contributed a story to the *New Blood Summer Special*, and she offered a section to his last issue of *Sensational She-Hulk*. Their collaboration ends a five-part *New Blood* story arc featuring Rayek, Leetah's former paramour and heroic villain of the original story.

"My work with John is like nothing that has ever been done before, from

my standpoint—it's an all-fight issue," she says. "In this issue, Cutter and Rayek duke it out once and for all. They've had this enmity all along and we decided to do this to clear the air."

"It's time to settle things between them," says Richard.

"With this issue, I can say that it has been a challenge, since I've never tried anything like it before," she admits. "It's hard for me to get my head into that place, fighting and not much else. Fighting for hours and hours is hard for me to imagine. So, John is choreographing the fight scenes, and inking my pencils. He's the best in the business, and it's a tremendous amount of fun to work with him."

Elfquest may not remain a comic book forever. Having signed with the high-powered Creative Artists Agency in Los Angeles, *Elfquest* now appears to be on the fast track for the big screen.

"We just got back from a trip to LA and had dinner with our agent," Richard explains. "I hesitate to name any names, since nothing has been signed yet, but a well-known producer has shown interest in developing *Elfquest* as a full-length movie."

"My first love has always been animation, but we're greedy—we would love to see a live-action version of *Elfquest*," Wendy says.

"Once upon a time," Richard adds, "we would have been adamantly against live-action, but with movies like *Terminator 2*, we don't see those limits any more."

"It would be very intriguing, with computer morphing, to see what they can do with live actors," she says. "To see live actors riding computer-generated wolves...that would be incredible,



wouldn't it? The book was really created with animation in mind. Right now, though, we're open to anything. Even puppets!"

Elfquest might have gotten to the big screen earlier, but for some problems that, Wendy Pini admits, were partly their own doing. "Many false starts were because we tried to keep too much control. I want the fans to know all the love and care that went into *Elfquest*."

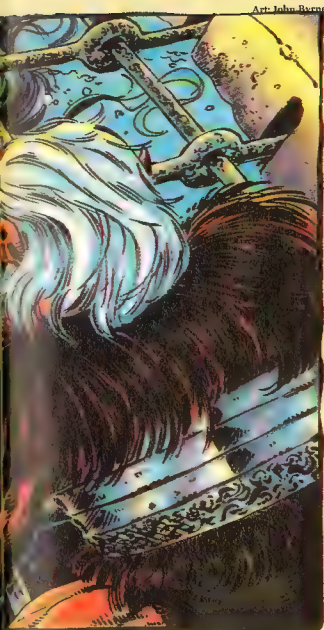
Believing new trails has been an *Elfquest* hallmark. Consider the list of "negatives" they faced: A self-published black and white comic featuring "cute" elves in a fantasy, co-written and drawn by a woman. Each of these elements has been considered newsstand poison by mainstream companies in the past (though black and white comics have had greater success in recent years), yet *Elfquest* carved out its own niche over the last 15 years. Its longevity stems from several factors, most of them related to those "negative" elements.

"There are a number of ways to look at [*Elfquest*'s longevity], but truthfully, Wendy has been a storyteller all her life," Richard says. "We have drawings of elves by her when she was two years old. We both grew up reading comic books, and met through comics. In



Photo: Courtesy: Warp Graphics

Fifteen years and still going strong, Richard and Wendy Pini continue to weave fascinating tales told around the campfire.



Art: John Byrne

John Byrne is one of the outside creators who has contributed to *New Blood*. "My work with John is like nothing that has ever been done before," Wendy Pini says.

1969, I attended college in Boston while she was in high school in California. She wrote a letter to *Silver Surfer* and it got printed. Being a female comics fan, which was virtually unique in those days, half a thousand other guys all wrote letters to her. I was lucky and must have won the lottery, because she answered mine. We wrote letters back and forth, visited and got married four years later. Wendy was illustrating science-fiction book covers."

"Comic art was an accident," she adds, "I thought I would be an illustrator."

"For us, 1977 was the pivotal year. *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters* came out, and *Wizards* and *Lord of the Rings* came along. The public saw that science fiction wasn't this bad, weird thing," Richard says. "Those films made millions, so we knew there was a demand for this kind of optimistic, upbeat storytelling. Wendy said, 'I've got this idea for these characters, and they have this adventure, this quest.' We sat down and talked about it, hashed it out, and realized we would like it to be a comic book."



Art: Wendy Pini

"Some of the characters have very definite destinies," Wendy Pini explains, "the destinies of these characters will get done." Ember included.



Art: Paul Abrams/Charles Barnett

Not concentrating directly on the Wolfriders, the *Hidden Years* team of Sarah Byam, Paul Abrams and Charles Barnett begin with the High Ones.



THEY MADE THE BEST OF IT,
THESE CASTAWAYS. THEY FORGED
ALLIANCES WITH THE LAND AND
WITH THE NATURAL CREATURES
OF THE WOODS.

TO THE WORLD OF TWO MOONS,
THEY BROUGHT CHANGE AND
DIFFERENT BODIES AND NEW
SONGS. THEY BROUGHT MAGIC!



"Whatever else we do," notes Richard Pini, *Elfquest* is small and open."

"We saw it as a movie in our heads, and the closest thing to moviemaking that we knew was working with storyboards," Wendy adds.

"So, armed with massive ignorance, we started to pursue publishing a comic. Neither of us knew anything about any of this, and understand that this was 1977. How many comic shops were there? Not as many as there are today. We didn't have to fight as hard as someone launching a book today would. Basically, I went to the Yellow Pages, looked up Printers and called one to ask, 'Can you do this?' I got a price and we did the first issue—much to our surprise and gratification, the only two distributors handling comics then took our entire print run of 5,000. Today, that figure is *nothing*, but then it was unheard of."

On top of all that, the Pinis had to contend with the lack of respect shown a female creator.

"For a woman to write and draw and self-publish her own series was



"Instead of inventing *Elfquest*, my job is to protect and defend what *Elfquest* is," Wendy Pini says. "My job is to be the keeper of the flame."

pretty damned presumptuous," Wendy recalls.

"There was a kind of disbelief, a 'What is this?' mentality. We really had nothing going for us other than that they were excellently written and drawn stories," Richard says.

The caliber of the artwork shows in the reaction that readers have on seeing the main characters, the elves themselves.

"We had a man come up to us and ask, 'Why do I feel so friendly toward these characters?'" Wendy explains. "Studies show that adults react protectively toward small, slender characters with larger eyes, because they look childlike and vulnerable. Our elves do

all kinds of adult things, from fighting to having sex to arguing over big questions, but their appearance makes them—I'll say it—cute. They're cute! We do cute elves! And people react to them. Not everybody has had a positive reaction—some folks have been really vocal in saying so—but we hit an emotional chord in people just with the characters' look."

"There's no question about it, *Elfquest* affects more people on an emotional than an intellectual level," Richard asserts. "That's not saying we're anti-intellectual, though the elves are action-oriented...but we do, uh, make use of..." "Oh, go ahead and say it, we exploit," Wendy interjects.



Fighting off the negatives in the comics industry, the Pinis have proven the doubters wrong and still successfully publish their books.

"...um, well," Richard confirms, "we exploit a certain emotionalism."

Elfquest has a widely varied readership, one highly unconventional compared to mainstream comics fans.

"We've been doing this year-long signing tour, and we've been to five or six conventions back-to-back, and the response has been way beyond our expectations," Richard says. "We have a not-huge, but very loyal core following of those who read *Elfquest*, but we had no idea that we would get so many of our readers into one place at one time. We've gone to some conventions and not been able to rest our right hands for a moment, the autographs are so

fast and furious."

Wendy adds, "We did a signing at the Golden Apple in Los Angeles and it went hours over the scheduled time. People were lined up around the block; we couldn't believe it! And it was such a mixed group: men, women, a diverse racial mix, old and young, college age. It's completely different from any other comic book audience I've seen. People grew up with it and now they bring their four-year-old children to meet us!"

"That kind of support and affection gives us a great deal of energy, not only this year but all the time," Richard says. "There's a lot of discussion going on right now in the industry about getting people to read comics, but 99

percent of what's going out isn't something I think Joe Average and his family would care to read. Why would they be interested in superhero slugfests? We've gone outside that market by selling collections through bookstores, which is where many people see *Elfquest* for the first time."

"From my point-of-view, the first thing that grabs a reader's attention is the artwork," Wendy declares. "It's different from what's in other comics; people have told me that the art reminds them of those beautiful, lavish illustrations they see in children's fairy-tale books. There is rough stuff there; a dark and gritty side, and people tell us it has shaken them up, because they don't expect that from their impression of the artwork. What we work for in *Elfquest* is storytelling that offers some escapism and hope, but that shows there's a darker, more challenging side of life. And, this is how our characters make sense of it all."

"So much of comics storytelling tries to be enormous," Richard says. "The death of Superman story, for instance, has elements of grandeur and tragedy, but it's so huge that it's almost inaccessible to a reader. Whatever else we do, *Elfquest* is small and open. These are stories told around a fire, with night pressing in."

"As a culture, we're getting more and more inured to things that happen in spectacular, blockbuster ways on TV, so that it takes more to penetrate. *Terminator 2* was much bigger than *Terminator*, just to have the same impact," he adds. "We're not out to be bigger and glitzier, we're more subversive. Those people who've been burned out, who get overloaded on violence, how 'bout we tickle their feelings of love and compassion?"

"It's sort of a soap opera with pointed ears and wolves," Wendy Pini asserts. "The traditional approach to heroic fantasy is Conan, swinging a big sword and fighting dragons, charging into the labyrinth to find the magical gem to open the locked gate. The stories we tell don't deal with that image, they deal with characters learning or overcoming problems. It isn't good vs. evil, but ignorance vs. knowledge. There's as much adventure in seeing a character grow out of a debilitating situation as in fighting some 'evil' monster. It's all about hope and healing."

"Somewhere else, a hero might find a magic sword as treasure; in *Elfquest*, the treasure might be a piece of himself that was missing. As a culture, we are getting more and more dissociated from our emotions, more hardened to the terrible things going on in the world. *Elfquest* tries to fight that, to awaken those feelings that are deadened in people."

X-CELLENT ADVENTURES

As the X-Men turn 30, it's up to Scott Lobdell to chronicle their exploits.

By DREW BITTNER

This is the 30th anniversary of those mighty mutants called the *Uncanny X-Men*, and Marvel is making it a banner year indeed. With the many X-projects in release, Scott Lobdell is one of the names to watch. His writing credits are legion: *Uncanny X-Men*, *X-Factor*, *Excalibur*, *X-Men: Survival Guide to the Mansion* and co-writer of the *X-Men Unlimited* quarterly. He's also now developing *Generation X*, a new X-title starring Banshee, slated to begin next year.

With so many characters to manage, how does Lobdell keep them all straight?

"Hey, I have a really big family," he says. Brothers, sisters, 18 nieces and nephews...I'm used to having lots of names and personalities to remember." Lobdell, a former COMICS SCENE contributor and a stand-up comedian, has major plans for his mutant heroes.

many of which will shock and surprise longtime X-fans. In *Uncanny X-Men*, the mutants' new era opens with a surprising (and, according to Lobdell, final) death.

"In issue #303, a death occurs that has a major impact on the Gold Team, hitting several members especially hard. We have a funeral for the deceased in #304; the attendees are a 'who's who' of characters in the X-Men universe. We try this really monumental task in #304, relating 30 years' worth of continuity within a single issue's context. The funeral is disrupted by the arrival of one of the X-Men's worst enemies, and when that happens, a long-standing X-Man leaves the group to join Magneto's Acolytes. It isn't a trick or a gimmick, because this character has a fundamental change of heart and chooses to follow this new course. It has a tremendous impact on the other X-Men, and they end up even more firmly dedicated to seeing Professor Xavier's dream fulfilled."

Although cynics might argue that the *X-Men* universe is growing too dark and grim to make Xavier's hopes eventually come true, Lobdell staunchly defends that dream as the X-Men's essence.



"It's feasible and workable," he says. "The X-Men are the light at the end of the tunnel, the ones who keep trying no matter how bad the odds or how impossible the chance of success. They're everything that's really noble about us as a species. If they don't believe in it, there's no reason for them to be together. And if I don't believe in it, I *shouldn't* be writing the book. There have been other writers who don't feel that way, though."

He adds that the current division of the large group into Blue and Gold teams will continue, and that Jubilee's "fated" status as the last X-Man was never meant to be engraved in stone.

"First off, Jubilee is *not* officially an X-Man now," Lobdell explains. "As for Bishop knowing the truth, we have to take his word for it. His future, and the way things get that way, is something we'll learn more about in the Bishop mini-series, which is in the works."

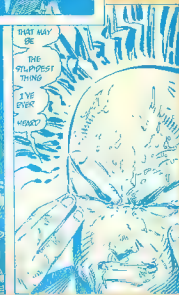
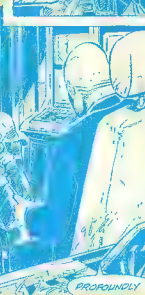
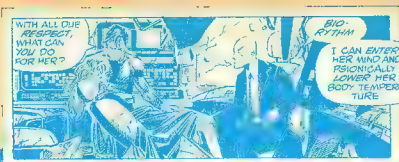
Beyond the funeral, the X-Men get pulled into a civil war between mutants and humans in Genosha. The results of this, he says, will alter the balance of human/mutant relations throughout the Marvel Universe for years to come.

"The civil war grows into an Avengers/X-Men crossover, celebrating both teams' 30th anniversaries. Quicksilver and Scarlet Witch are the focal point, because they're the natural connection between these two groups, and they have to deal with the fact that their father is the mutant equivalent of



Photo: Courtesy: Scott Lobdell

Writing *Uncanny X-Men*, *X-Factor*, *Excalibur*, *X-Men: The Survival Guide to the Mansion*, co-writing *X-Men Unlimited* and developing *Generation X* is a handful, but for Scott Lobdell, "I put my energies toward writing the book. I don't have the time or the energy to deal with pressure."



"I find Professor X to be infinitely more fascinating than most people," notes Lobdell.

Adolph Hitler. How do they cope? This is big stuff; I mean it when I say things will be different after this story."

In Lobdell's hands, the Acolytes will become the "dark X-Men, sort of," serving as the group's nemesis on several different levels. In fact, Lobdell says the Acolytes could have been the X-Men, if things had worked out differently.

"We introduced Emilio Voght in *Uncanny* #300, and alluded that he might have been one of Xavier's first recruits, maybe his first student, who made another choice. The Acolytes could have been a great [heroic] team. But they're dedicated to Magneto, and they're at least as dedicated to his ideals as Cyclops, Storm and the rest are

to Xavier's ideals. I want to do lots with that philosophical difference, to make it more than just people in costumes beating each other up.

"Charles Xavier is the book's linchpin, and he's really the most influential character among all the books," Lobdell adds. "His dream is what brought them and keeps them together. I find Professor X to be infinitely more fascinating than most people do; he has been very underrated by fandom, but he's the X-Men's focal point. Over the last few months, he has been more central to the action and I think that will continue.

"It's funny, because in the first *X-Men Unlimited*, Cyclops tries real hard to call the professor by his first name,



"To me," says the writer, "Nightcrawler is the heart and soul of the X-Men."

Art: Chris Bachillo/Dan Fausan

at his request—and he can't do it! To Scott Summers [Cyclops], Charles is always 'the professor,'" Lobdell says. "Some things will never change."

Change is the byword on Lobdell's two newest projects. His second team book, *X-Factor*, diverges from former writer Peter David's offbeat take on these "second-string mutants" (CSS #5). Lobdell says that his angle on the government's own mutant strike force takes them away from what he calls David's *Charlie's Angels* approach.

"They used to get their assignments, go out and fight, then come back and that was it," Lobdell says. "We're going to put the government stuff on the back burner for awhile. Forge steps into the role that Val Cooper vacates, to set himself up as a buffer between Havok and the government, and they do some other kinds of things than just mission after mission."

Val Cooper will hardly be forgotten, however.

"When we first saw this lady, she had her hands in so many pies, it was hard to keep them all straight," he says. "For the last year, she has focused her attention on *X-Factor*, while mutant problems cropped up around the world. That's more her true line of work. She'll still be a presence in the book, but she won't be their manager. I see her more as a Nick Fury-type specializing in mutants."

Lobdell is plotting *X-Factor*, while his oldest comics ally, J.M. DeMatteis (CS #4), scripts.

"He got me into comics," Lobdell says. "He encouraged me to keep at it, and isn't it ironic that we would end up collaborating on a book?"

After tying up some loose ends, Lobdell says that *X-Factor's* tone will concentrate on new elements while being faithful to what came before.

"I won't try to duplicate what Peter did in *X-Factor*," he says. "The stories' overall humorous tone—that'll be scrapped. It's going to be a character-driven book, and it'll be a significant change. There won't be any personnel changes, though, which is a trap that many new writers fall into; they think, 'Let's toss everything out and start over,' which is something I don't want to do. I would rather find out who these people are, because they all have great stories to tell. That's better than trying to be new and different, to be *hot*. I would rather stick with what I've got and see where it takes me."

He has quite a handful of assorted mutants to work with in this team, starting with a confused, heartbroken Scots wolfgirl.

"Rahne, in trying to break her mutant/master bond with Alex, goes to Muir Island for treatment and is gone



The 30th anniversary begins in *X-Factor* #92, an issue where Quicksilver finally confronts his father's legacy.

from the team for six issues. During that time," Lobdell notes, "her relationship with Moira MacTaggart is really explored, since we're going to try and define who she is."

His plans for these characters will alter how they're seen by the readers, some in positive ways and some not. "I thoroughly enjoy writing Polaris," he says by way of example. "She took a back seat to all the comedic elements in *X-Factor*, but I plan to put her right in the forefront."

Jamie Madrox, the Multiple Man, undergoes some severe changes when he learns more about his powers and the way they interact with his personality. In a traumatic moment, Jamie takes a life during a battle.

"That happens in *X-Factor* #92," Lobdell confirms. "It's going to have a major effect on him for the next year. There's going to be a time when he only speaks to people through his dupes. It's very easy to distance yourself from people, to hide from a traumatic experience, when you can create duplicates of yourself; getting away from your problems takes on a whole new meaning. With his constant wisecracking, Jamie's not well-prepared to deal with his problems. This situation forces him to confront himself and do the kind of introspection he has always been able to avoid."

Marvel's most volatile speedster comes into his own in that issue, when he must finally face his father's legacy.

"For a man who has struggled his whole life with being a superhero," Lobdell says, "the legacy that Magneto bequeathed to Quicksilver has more emotional weight than he can bear."

His third X-Men title is *Excalibur*. With co-creator Alan Davis' departure (CS #30), the fate of these Britain-based mutants is very much up in the air.

"We start off with a three-part story that's Corise's origin," he says. "It reveals aspects of her character that will come as a complete shock to the other team members. Despite their reaction, they try to help her out of the predicament that forced her to come to Earth in the first place."

"Right after that, issue #71 will be the final chapter of 'Fatal Attractions' [the "Magneto Returns" storyline]. This issue resolves the one plot thread that every X-fan has wanted settled: The relationship between Kitty Pryde and Peter Rasputin. The lead-in to that is the tail end of *Uncanny* #302. Jubilee answers the door and finds Kitty standing there with a suitcase."

In the future, *Excalibur* will function more internationally, which involves the addition of new characters drawn from around the globe, while some other characters won't be exactly the same as they were. More than that, Lobdell cannot say.

However, he does state that Meggan is the central character in one of his first major story arcs. "She's in a catatonic depression from a personal loss, and it's up to Feron to cheer her up by introducing her to someone new," the writer explains, adding that it involves magic and Britain's own super-powered protector.

Meanwhile, one of Lobdell's favorite mutants may be rejoining his American comrades. "To me, Nightcrawler is the heart and soul of the X-Men," he says. "I liked him more when he was this light-hearted, happy-go-lucky guy than the dour person he has been lately. I mean, look at it: Lots of mutants look like they could fit perfectly well into the mainstream, with no reason to resent their lot in life—then you have Nightcrawler. He's the worst nightmare of what a mutant could look like, yet he manages to come through it all with his innate goodness and a desire to help the world that, quote, 'fears and hates him.' Literally."

"As for some unresolved plots with Nightcrawler, let's just say that no X-fan is more eager than I am to learn the story behind this relationship between Nightcrawler, Mystique and Rogue. I want to know how the first two relate, and how Mystique and Rogue are connected. So, we'll be doing something with that plotline."





Working in this mutant universe may seem dark and foreboding, but to Lobdell, "the X-Men are the light at the end of the tunnel."



"We're going to try and define who Rahne is," explains Lobdell.

For a change of pace, Lobdell recommends the new, quarterly *X-Men Unlimited*. He shares the writing chores on this title with fellow X-scribes Fabian Nicieza and Marc DeMatteis.

"I thoroughly enjoy writing Polaris," the writer says.

"What's really great about this new book is that it's huge! It's over 40 pages we can devote to *one* story, which is a bigger canvas to paint on than a regular book's 22 pages. I don't think the other *Unlimiteds* being done really take advantage of the format—they have one lead story and two smaller pieces, while we devote the whole thing to one big story. We're looking to turn each issue into the *Citizen Kane* of comics."

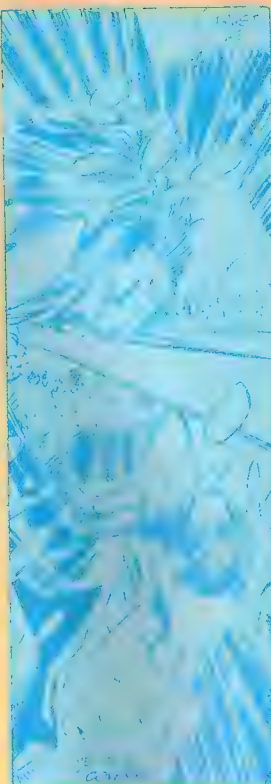
That first adventure is certainly big; Cyclops, Storm and Professor X crash-land in the Antarctic and must survive the most desolate and hostile environment on Earth.

"The essential element is that these are powerful mutants, but all their powers avail them nothing," Lobdell says. "Storm can control the weather, sure, but she can't control a whole continent's climate. So, these characters come face to face with their mortality. It's bigger than who's team leader, who has a flashy costume—they realize, if they hadn't before, that they are super-human characters. They see that, being mutants, they run the risk of losing touch with their humanity."

"*X-Men* fans expect more for their buck, and they get it with this title. It isn't 40-some pages of slicing, smashing, bashing—they're character-driven stories that show them in entirely new ways that don't come across in a fight."

Some *X-Men Unlimited* stories will showcase their enemies, establishing what characteristics set them apart from each other. Lobdell admits some puzzlement over why fans like certain villains.

"One thing I'm amazed by is when fans write and say what a wonderful character Mr. Sinister is. As near as I can figure, Mr. Sinister has had several different allusions to his origin, as well as more variations on his powers than I can count. He's completely ambiguous, and I don't find that as interesting as a character



Art: Chris Bachillo/Dan Fierman

"With the X-Men's 30th upon us, I have to say that it's nice to be here."

who has been developed. With so many evil mutants running around, we have to see what separates one from the other. Mr. Sinister should be different from Apocalypse, who has to be different from Stryfe and from Holocaust (an upcoming X-villain). If they aren't different, then they're just a collection of powers wrapped up in a costume.

"We have a future *Unlimited* that focuses on the XSE, the group Bishop was part of," he adds. "It all takes place in the XSE future. My own personal feeling is that the alternate timeline/continuum/universe story has been told. If alternate universes are so interesting, what makes our universe unique? There's enough going on right here; we don't need to send characters to all these parallel worlds."

Lobdell sees *Unlimited* as having a



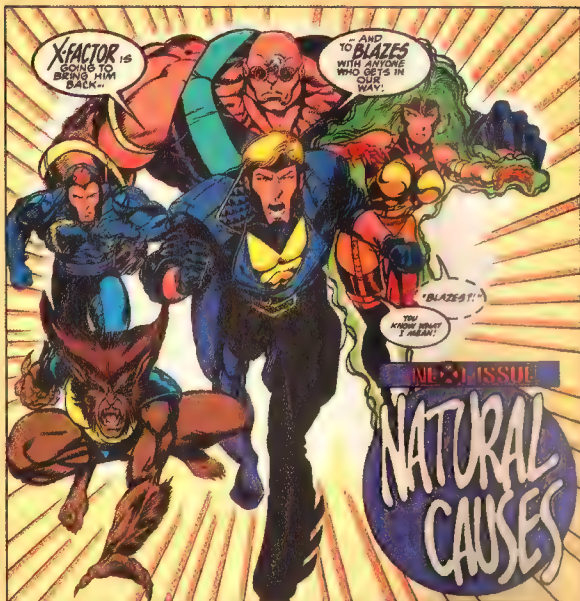
very specific function among all the other X-titles. "X-Men Unlimited is a magnifying glass for all those people interested in the X-heroes—who they are inside, not just who they're fighting that week."

Having written *X-Men: Survival Guide to the Mansion*, a handbook of the X-Men's headquarters, Lobdell claims to love the X-Mansion so much that enemies won't make trashing the place a monthly event. However, he does want to destroy one part of the Mansion once and for all: The holographic technology in the Danger Room.

"I hate it! It's such a crutch—whenever you don't have a good way to move the story, show a batch of guys in the Danger Room," he grumbles. "I really want to fry the computer that runs all that stuff. Other than that, though, the Mansion has endured all it needs to endure. I don't have plans for the evil-mutant-of-the-week to show up and blast their home to splinters; that has been done. I mean, if I was an X-Man, I would never answer the door! Everybody but the pizza guy and the land shark from *Saturday Night Live* has broken through the door and leveled the place! No, one change we're making is that the bad guys'll have to work much harder to hit the X-Men first. They won't be sitting ducks."

The Mansion does undergo one significant change with the advent of Lobdell's upcoming *Generation X*: The name on the front gate becomes The Xavier Institute, while the former Massachusetts Academy (training ground of the bygone Hellions under Emma Frost) is the new School for Gifted Youngsters.

"It'll be run by Banshee," Lobdell explains. "There's not much to be said



X-Factor's recent humorous tone will be "scrapped," says Lobdell. "It's going to be a character-driven book."

right now, really. Emma Frost's old school is just sitting there and Sean [Banshee] Cassidy takes it over." Emma Frost, the White Queen, was supposedly left brain dead in her last appearance, a condition Lobdell is apparently in no hurry to change.

"Let's just say she won't be getting panel space anytime soon," he notes.

Lobdell will be designing the first class of young mutants to attend the school with artist Chris Bachalo, best known for his work on DC's *Vortigo* titles *Death: The High Cost of Living* and *Shade the Changing Man*.

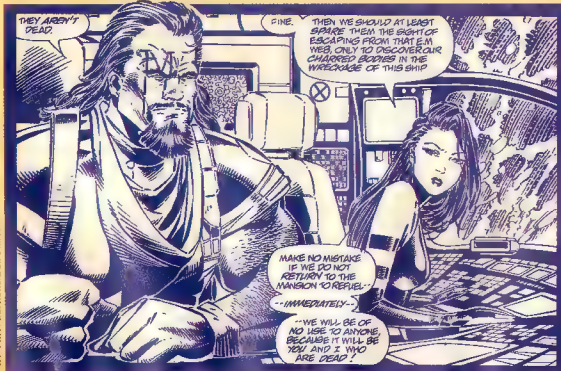
"We're doing the characters together, rather than me inventing them and Chris drawing them later," he says. "The roster hasn't been set yet, but these will be entirely new characters, as opposed to grabbing up stray Misfits, leftover X-Terminators or whatever. We won't be the clearing house for neglected mutants; we're gonna be the X-Men of the '90s!"

Lobdell says that *Generation X* is more about learning and personal growth than becoming a hardcore mutant fighting machine.

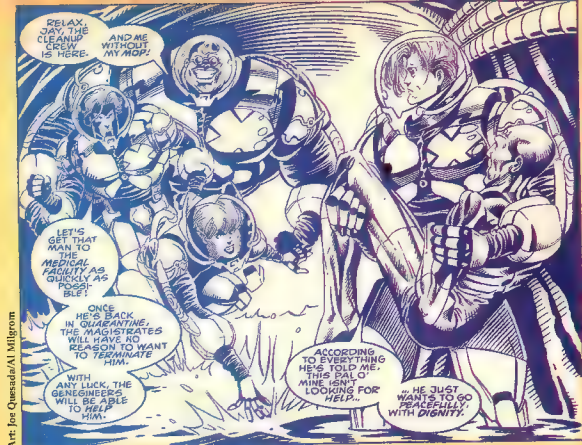
"There's a place for those books, or Marvel wouldn't do them, but this book is away from all that," he says. "Cable is a warrior and soldier, so his worldview is built on combat; Banshee was a spy, an Interpol agent. He wants to teach his students what they need to know to adapt and survive."

"Cable taught his students to be weapons, and killers when they have to be; Banshee's students are taught how to do everything but pull a trigger on an enemy."

To lead into this series, one upcoming



"X-Men Unlimited is a magnifying glass for all those people interested in the X-heroes."



Art: Joe Quinada/M. Milgrom

In a dramatic turn of events, Jamie Madrox, the Multiple Man, takes on a harsh reality and "with his constant wisecracking, he's not prepared to deal with his problems."

A major theme in Lobdell's *X-Men Unlimited* "is that these are powerful mutants, but all their powers avail them nothing."

ing *X-Men Unlimited* reveals Banshee's role in the creation of X-villain Omega Red, while the series revolves around how Banshee relates to his young charges and the life-lessons he gives.

"I'm excited about *Generation X*'s potential," Lobdell declares. "Some people around the office call it 'Mutants 90210' but I hope it'll be more than that."

Byond chronicling the adventures of the many mutants, Lobdell says that he has aspirations and new horizons to look toward in his ongoing career.

"I'm eager to create my own characters and my own team, but that's only after I've done my duty by the characters I'm writing now," he says. "I would like to write the first superhero romantic comedy—something that would be not unlike *Moonlighting*, where the guy and the girl love each other but it's impossible, due to the situation they're in."

"Now, lest you think I'm saving all my 'good' ideas, I should say that these are different types of stories [from *X-Men*]. It's like writing a dramatic, hour-long TV series and then having a sitcom; you wouldn't bring that drama to the table when you're writing, just like I don't bring stand-up into my comics."

He did introduce some stand-up elements in the Marvel Universe, though, by giving the ne'er-do-well Captain Ultra a career in comedy. "I did a story for *Marvel Comics Presents* where Captain Ultra's a stand-up by night and a superhero by—what? Later night, I guess. I have big plans for him someday. [Editor] Bob Harras won't let me bring him into the X-Men, even though it's all tongue-in-cheek. And no editor will let me do a Shamrock graphic novel. I love that character! She's terrific, even if she does have a bad costume."

Excalibur supporting character Micromax would be one of his top candidates for a mini-series, too. "Micromax is a great character," he says. "He's somebody I would like to see developed further."

Nor are Lobdell's ambitions limited to the Marvel Universe alone. "I would like to write *Teen Titans* sometime," he says. "That was a book that had so much energy behind it, then it all evaporated and now they're trying to bring it back. It could have been really big—and I think there's still life in those characters."

Lobdell adds that the 30th anniversary of the *X-Men* might not have been such a major event without one man's long-lasting contribution, not only to the mutant army he helped develop, but to the art of comics writing itself.

"With the *X-Men*'s 30th upon us, I



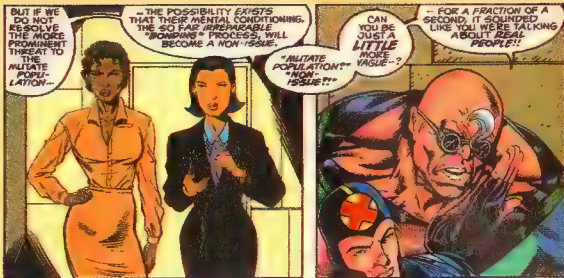
Art: Chris Bachillo/Dan Posman

have to say that it's nice to be here—but I would be negligent if I, and the rest of the industry, didn't recognize what Chris Claremont's contributions to the comics industry have been," Lobdell says. "A good part of our entire industry is based on his work. While he's no longer writing the book, what he has done for the comics industry in general, and the X-Men in particular, is incalculable. I really believe that years from now, when people study comics as an art form, they'll be studying Claremont, and put him in the same class as Stan Lee."

For a writer still fairly new to the business, Lobdell is occupying what could be the ultimate pressure cooker job in comics. He admits the pressure gets to be a bit much at times, but there are ways of handling it.

"When I got started as a stand-up comedian, I knew that every comedian dreams of a *Tonight Show* performance. At the same time, not every comedian wants to host the *Tonight Show*, because it's a helluva lot of work and stress. It's the same thing here—I wanted to write comics, and to write bestselling comics, ideally, but writing *Uncanny* is whole magnitudes above writing anything else. You know, for instance, that #300 will sell more than a million copies; you take that for granted. How many books can say that? It's the same as writing anything else, but the amount of work is just staggering.

"I'm not someone who deals well



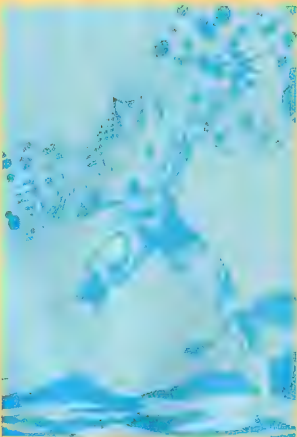
A civil war in Genosha pulls the X-characters and the Avengers into battle. "This is big stuff," says Lobdell. "I mean it when I say things will be different after this story."

with pressure," he admits. "[Writing several X-Men titles] is a pressure situation, but my job is to do the story; the pressures that come with [the job] come from fan perceptions, sales, marketing—none of which I have control over. Rather than worry about what I can't control, I put my energies toward the writing. I don't have the time or energy to deal with pressure."

Nevertheless, being the writer of such a fan phenomenon means overnight celebrity. Lobdell says being a stand-up comedian was his best preparation for facing mobs of fans at conventions. "I've opened for Jerry Seinfeld, Richard Belzer, Gilbert Gottfried—all of which is great training for handling crowds," he explains. "What I've learned from doing stand-up is, the more normal you are, the more normally people treat you. Some artists and writers want to go around with entourages of 10 to 15 people; that's their style and how they cope with fame. I try to be as normal and accessible as I've ever been; it helps keep things in perspective. If I were to put myself on a pedestal above fans, sure, they might go with it for awhile, but I would just be setting myself up for a fall sooner or later. As far as I'm concerned, I'm just the guy who's writing the books now."

Lobdell says that his formula for getting into comics in the first place was fairly simple: Write, and be ready for rejection.

"It was a test of wills," he confesses. "Either Marvel would break or I would. Guess who won? I know firsthand the frustration of trying to break into comics. The only thing I would say [to a would-be writer] is that, frus-



Art: Jon Quastad/Al Milgrom

"There's a place for those books, or Marvel wouldn't do them," he says of the X-titles.

trating as it is, the new talent out there should keep trying. It's hard, and demoralizing, and sometimes humiliating, but it is possible to break into the business.

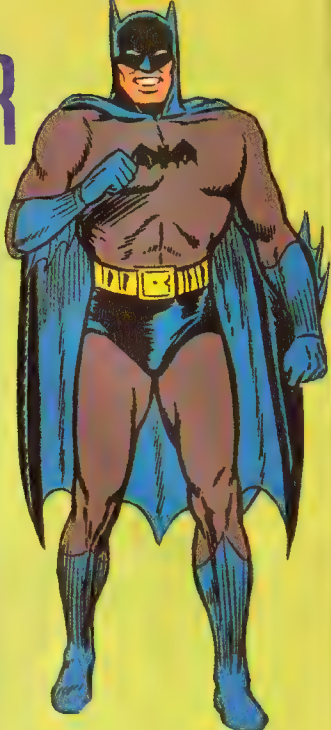
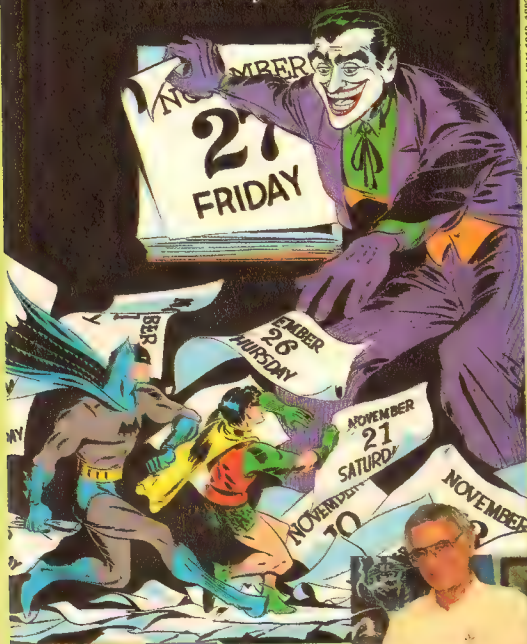
"You know how everyone else says, 'Oh, it isn't what you know, but who you know' and stuff like that, but those are only excuses for not trying. I know it might sound really pretentious, like, 'I'm here so I can lecture you,' but I mean this in an encouraging way. If I listened to everyone who said it wasn't possible," Scott Lobdell notes, "I'd never be writing *Uncanny X-Men*." **CS**



For Lobdell, change is the major word for his X-tenure.

LIFE WITH THE JOKER

With Bob Kane & Bill Finger, Jerry Robinson introduced the Clown Prince of Crime.



Part One

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

The bigger the villain, the bigger the hero would be when he overcame him."

That's the philosophy that led Jerry Robinson to create the Joker, one of the greatest villains in comics history. The Golden Age artist, now a highly-successful editorial cartoonist, made a number of other contributions to comics in general and the *Batman* mythos in particular. The most memorable, however, is undoubtedly the Joker, the Clown Prince of Crime who debuted in *Batman* #1, appearing in two of the four stories in that historic comic.

"Everyone immediately loved the Joker and wanted to bring him back," says Robinson. "In fact, at the end of the first story, Bill Finger's script had the Joker killed. We immediately changed the ending because we

Jerry Robinson's distinguished career began with a certain caped crusader.



Photo: Laura Bradach

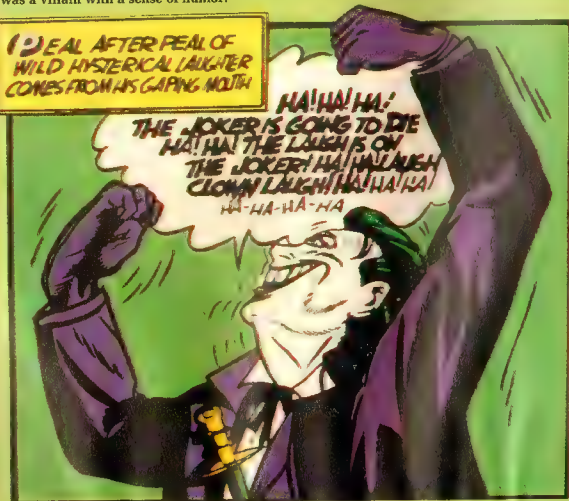
Art: Jerry Robinson. All Batman Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1960, 1981, 1993, 1994 DC Comics Inc.

"Bill was a great craftsman and a great storyteller. Half the credit for Batman *should* go to Bill Finger, no

PEAL AFTER PEAL OF
WILD HYSTERICAL LAUGHTER
COMES FROM HIS GAPING MOUTH

HA! HA! HA!
THE JOKER IS GOING TO DIE
HA! HA! THE LAUGH IS ON
THE JOKER! HA! HA! LAUGH
CLOWN LAUGH! HA! HA! HA!
HA-HA-HA-HA

"I must say that the give-and-take was very good, and I give Bob a lot of credit for that. I felt like a part of the team in a very short time. I had something to contribute, and I think Bob recognized that, and I don't remember having any feelings of being excluded. Bob was very good like that—when he saw a good idea, he would recognize it, as did Bill; and not just for me, but also each other. We would have sessions where we contributed ideas and argued about them." Such discussions were what led Robinson to name one of DC's most enduring characters, "I remember arguing about the name 'Robin' very specifically, and I felt free to argue my point until I won it," he says. "I wanted it to be 'Robin,' not some super-name like 'Mercury' or some of the others considered. It was very gratify-



ing, and I felt very much a part of it. I would contribute as much as I could.

"We had very little interference from the editors and publishers at DC. I think they recognized that it was selling, and you don't tamper with something when it's going good. Whitney Ellsworth was our editor. I can't speak as highly of our publishers, but the editors were good."

At the beginning, the Batman team consisted of Kane and Finger, with Robinson joining them very early on. But that was it.

"We were the only ones. We were the Batman team at that time," Robinson says. "Bill and I were going to leave. We had gotten offers to work for other publishers, because once *Batman* hit, they wanted anyone who had anything to do with the success. They couldn't get Bob, because he was signed with DC, but we weren't. We were just working for Bob then. When DC heard that we were going to leave to work for other publishers, they didn't want to break up the team, naturally, in their own interests. So, they made us an offer to work directly for them. We got huge [salary] increases. That was really the only reason for not working together directly with Bob. Physically, Bob lived in the Bronx, and I got a studio and an apartment together with another artist [in Manhattan], so I rarely saw Bob after that."

"I worked at either DC or in my own studio. For example, whenever I went to DC to work on *Batman*, Bob may have laid out pencils, and I would finish it without necessarily seeing him. Then, I would do my own stories. I would pencil and ink directly for DC, and Bob would never see it until it was published. I would work directly for Whitney Ellsworth."

Although many comics historians are well aware of Kane, Finger and Robinson's work on *Batman*, not so many can identify the fourth person behind the Bat-titles.

"George Roussos was hired while Bill and I were still working directly for Bob," says Robinson. "He was hired to assist me in inking backgrounds. It was getting to be too much to letter and ink the figures and backgrounds and everything else. We were now appearing in three different magazines—*Detective*, *Batman* and *World's Finest*. We needed more help, so George—a very good background artist—was hired, and he took over lettering. That relieved me to do more inking; after that, we were all hired by DC—George, too."

Some of the greatest creators in comics were working together at that time, Robinson recalls. "At one time, we had a very exciting bullpen. Jack Kirby and Joe Simon worked for DC. Our drawing boards were lined up, and



"Half the credit for *Batman* should go to [writer] Bill Finger, no question about it," says Robinson of the man who scripted many early adventures.

it was Kirby, Simon, Joe Shuster, Fred Wray—who inked the *Batman* covers—myself, George, Charlie Paris."

Strangely, he never met Dick Sprang, one of the classic *Batman* pencilers of the '40s, '50s and '60s. "Dick took over when I was leaving, but we both were drawing *Batman* at the same time, and I never met him."

"Then, we were both guests at the San Diego Comic Con two or three years ago, and we were invited to a party by a San Diego comics club. [Inker] Charlie Paris was there, who I did know, but hadn't seen since those days [in the '40s]. Then, I met Dick, and we fell into each other's arms and hugged each other. We then realized that this was the first time we had ever seen each other! But somehow, we felt we knew one another and that we were the oldest of friends—it was such a wonderful feeling. Somebody took a picture of the three of us, which I have in my studio now. So, 50 years later, we had this *Batman* reunion!"

In recent interviews, Kane has implied that he took an increasingly larger role in the Joker's creation, but Robinson says the true story has been part of the record for decades.

"I never started a controversy with Bob. I've been interviewed many times, and that story was told many years ago; nobody ever said anything different," he says. "This controversy only started when *Batman* [the movie] came out, and Bob got all the publicity. He gave contrary versions—I don't know why. For years, I must say that Bob wasn't getting the credit he deserved, and I said so in all the interviews. I told what I contributed and what I didn't. I'm very careful about saying what I did and how much I did. The Joker is the only character I created. Aside from drawing all the other characters, the only other specific thing I did was to name Robin."

Robinson admits that he only created the Joker in order to fill a need for additional stories. "*Batman* #1 was just about to be published, and they needed more stories. Bill was the only writer, and he was really loaded [with work], I said, 'I'll contribute a story if I can,' and he said, 'Fine.' I was still a student in the Columbia School of Journalism, so I thought I could write a script for *Batman* and turn it in as one of my



Batman's greatest and most popular enemies, like the Cat-Woman, were introduced during the Finger/Kane/Robinson/George Roussos days.



"I'm very careful about saying what I did and how much I did," notes Robinson. "The Joker is the only character I created, the only other specific thing I did was to name Robin."

creative writing requirements.

"My first idea was for a villain, because I was a student of literature at Columbia, and I knew that all the great heroes of literature and mythology had antagonists. David had Goliath, Sherlock Holmes had Moriarty, but Batman didn't have that equivalent—they were all small-time crooks. The comics grew out of the '20s and '30s, when gangsters were the villains—Pretty Boy Floyd, John Dillinger and all those. In comics, the villains were hijackers, bootleggers and gangs that would rob warehouses. I wanted a villain a little larger than life.

"There was a dichotomy at the time which seems obvious now, and it wasn't because of my foresight. It was born out of my courses that we needed a strong villain. It was thought by some that if you made the villain too strong, it would detract from the hero, and you didn't want anybody that big. I thought, 'The bigger the villain, the bigger the hero would be when he overcame him.' It seems obvious now, but it wasn't at that time.

"So, that's what I set out to do—an ongoing villain whom Batman could focus on. From that, I decided that I wanted to have a villain who was a contradiction of his character, which makes for an interesting personality. My contradiction was a villain with a sense of humor. From that, I came to the idea of naming him the Joker. I always proceeded with names first, so I could then flesh out the character. I tried to visualize him before I even began to write the rest of the script. I played cards a lot, and I immediately made the association of the Joker with the playing card.

"I remember that night, searching frantically in my apartment for a deck of cards for that visual image. I felt I had to have it right. Luckily, I found a deck, and it had that classic symbol of the Joker head. I thought, 'My God, that's it!' The name is the Joker, this is the villain, and that's his calling card.' I had a number of other ideas, but not the plot. I couldn't wait to get in the next morning and tell Bill and Bob the story I was writing for Batman."

There was no question that the Clown Prince of Crime was going to be popular, he notes. "Everybody knew it was a natural from the word 'Go.' They said it was a great idea—in fact, too great. At that first meeting, they said, 'Well, we're going to do the first Batman issue, and we'll make that the first story, but Bill should really write it, because he's the most experienced writer.' This would have been my first Batman story, and I figured I would spend a couple of weeks writing it, because they didn't need it right away. I was absolutely persuaded by Bill and Bob—they loved the idea and

(continued on page 64)



Trail of Tears

Mike Grell unveils the heroic image of a mystic warrior-healer known as Stalking Wolf.

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON



spirit quest, and power comes to him through the Sun Dance ceremony. The Earth Spirit tells him he has been chosen to be the warrior-healer endowed with powers of the animals and the elements, and can even draw on the planet's life-force itself. But, the power is changing, just as Earth is changing, and what affects Earth affects Joshua Brand. He can't deny the power for very long, much as he tries. Since the power calls *him*, he doesn't really control when it's going to take him over—he can't exactly yell 'Shazam!' It's not his choice."

Brand knows that the power has

taken over when an old Indian symbol appears on him—a symbol utilized in his logo—and he's transformed into his superheric alter ego.

"The logo is an eye with three red stripes coming from the right eye. Sioux shamens do mark their faces that way, and the red markings on his face are the first indication that the power is upon him. When that happens, he becomes Stalking Wolf, the physical embodiment of the Earth and animal powers, older and more angular in appearance, with a nifty suit, bulging muscles and hair *any* length I decide to draw it!" laughs Grell. "It all causes

"Over the years," says Mike Grell, "I've discovered that characterization is not just an important thing, it's *everything*, if you're going to make the story live. You can't sell a book based on pretty pictures."

Don't be fooled if Mike Grell is crying *Shaman's Tears*—he's having a great deal of fun!

Grell calls his new ongoing series for Image "a blend of metaphysics and superheroes," combining elements of Native American culture, nature, ecology and super-action. The longtime comics writer/artist says he developed it all when he was approached by Todd McFarlane to create a book for Image.

"I was looking for something that would have a broad appeal to today's comic-buying market, and to myself," says Grell. "I write the kind of stories that I would like to read, and fortunately, my tastes seem to be fairly well in line with the comic-buying public, based on sales over the last 20 years."

Shaman's Tears deals with real issues facing the world, like pollution, corruption, crime, ecological genocide, science running away with no thought about the ultimate outcome, the pending extinction of man, plus high adventure, characters with interesting quirks or foibles and," he says, "lots of good shoot-'em-ups!"

The hero of *Shaman's Tears* is Joshua Brand, who has spent most of his adult life trying to deny his Native American heritage (his father is half-Sioux).

"Growing up on a reservation, he found that he wasn't enough of one, too much of the other—not white enough to suit the white kids in town, not Indian enough to suit the Indians," says Grell. "The bigotry proved too much for him to deal with, so he left town. He returns to Medicine Hat, his old reservation, because his mother is dying. He encounters a medicine man who had been his mentor as a child, and is led on a path toward the Great Mystery. Brand promised his mother that he would seek a vision through a



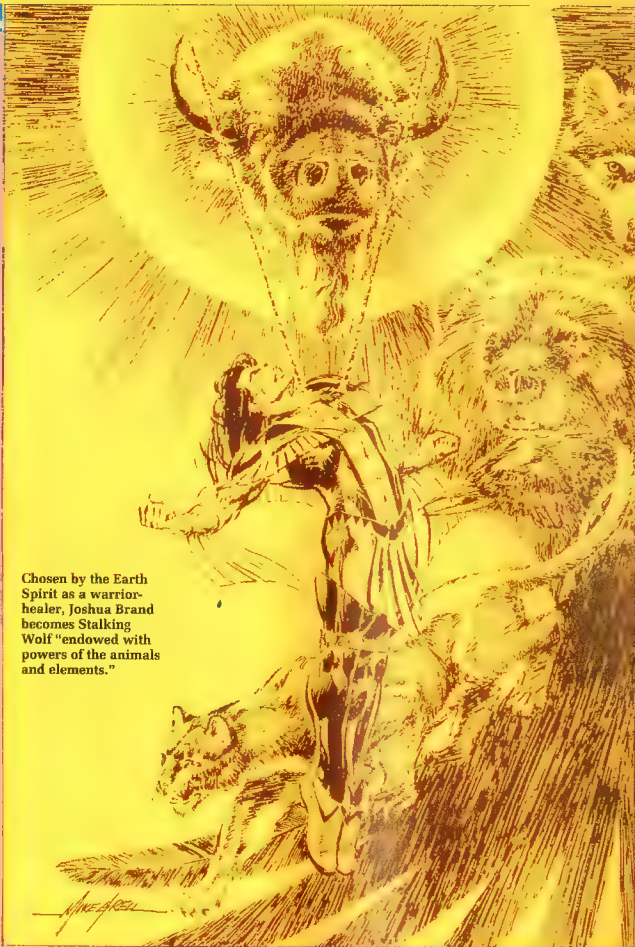
All Shaman's Tears Characters, Icon & Art. Trademark & Copyright 1993 Mike Grell

more serious problems in his life. He's in almost continual conflict with the people who represent his past—his return to the reservation town isn't exactly joyous."

Grell explains that he wanted to call his hero "Shaman," but in addition to being a somewhat generic term, a Marvel Comics character had already laid claim to the name. "In looking for something else with style and power, I chose Stalking Wolf, which is also the name of an Apache medicine man who was a teacher and spiritual guide," Grell explains. "The shaman's power is as much the power of healing as it is the power of war, and the shaman is typically referred to as the 'warrior-healer.' His real mission is to heal the Earth, to bring mankind back to the path of the Great Mystery, to teach people to help themselves and live in harmony with nature—things that we've denied over the years."

The opening story in the first four issues deals with the result of genetic experiments conducted on an orbiting Soviet spacecraft while the Soviet Union was dissolving, and the battle over rights to the scientific data on board.

"In my version, the experiments on board the space station are aimed at creating new life forms through gene splicing," says Grell. "Specifically, their purpose was to create an army and a work force of super-warriors and super-workers, combining human and animal DNA to form an entirely new race physically superior to man, even though they're patented life forms without any human rights—slaves who are bought and sold as commodities. Air Force General Patrick Pending is in charge of NASA's military satellite program, but the dissolution of the Soviet Union doesn't exactly mean job security for him. He teams up with a rogue Russian scientist, Dr. Regus Patoff, who was formerly in charge of the KGB Space Research Division, and is now among the ranks of the unemployed capitalist wannabes. They mount a salvage operation to pirate the scientific data on board the Soviet space station for themselves, and form a group called Circle Sea Laboratories—the logo is pretty self-explanatory—and they go about their business with little regard for the consequences. But, tampering with new life forms causes a disruption in the life force itself, which is the unifying force in Indian lore—the force that flows through all living things, and even binds the planet. It's not nice to mess with Mother Nature, and that's



Chosen by the Earth Spirit as a warrior-healer, Joshua Brand becomes Stalking Wolf "endowed with powers of the animals and elements."

why she chooses a warrior to fight for her—Joshua Brand."

Besides corporate maneuvers and ecological concerns, *Shaman's Tears* offers an array of first-class costumed villains and slam-bang action. "I've got a cast and crew that's just a kick in the pants!" Grell exclaims. "They've gone through about 27 variations in names, but I finally came up with the sort of generic title *The Blood*. They represent mankind's greatest fears, the embodiment of the potentially destructive force in runaway scientific experimentation. It's what could happen if ex-

perimentation gets completely out of control."

The Blood will eventually get its own spin-off book, called *Bar Sinister*, Grell says, explaining that in heraldry, the bar sinister runs diagonally from the upper left to lower right, symbolizing the bastard.

"*Bar Sinister* is comprised of the Circle Sea Laboratory creations, forms of animal and human DNA with humanoid appearance, which helps them function reasonably normally, though they also have animal-like qualities that lend them to industrial or military

MIKE GRELL

SHAMAN'S TEARS



"It's not nice to mess with Mother Nature, and that's why she chooses a warrior to fight for her," the creator explains.

Layout & Design: Calvin Lee

roles and assignments. They're an entire core of individuals, some of whom will break away from Circle Sea to form Bar Sinister, changing their alliances," he says.

The group is composed of Banner, who combines human and badger characteristics, a Danny DeVito-sized Arnold Schwarzenegger, a hirsute individual who spends big bucks on haircuts and manicures. He's also a magnet for women. Docket is simian

with a prehensile tail and feet—a big Toshiro Mifune fan, he has four Japanese short swords that he wields like a cuisinart on speed. Sigil is a human/vampire bat combination with all the traits of albinism; she can navigate by echo-location and has a great set of wings. Signet is ermine, extremely lithe, flexible and as vicious as the day is long. Blazon combines man and wolf; he's a combat model engineered for adaptability, intelligence,

strength, cunning and savagery—he's definitely leadership quality. Their problem child is Animus Prime, the very first man-beast, who was created on the Soviet space station and brought back to Earth, where they're having great difficulty getting him to cooperate.

"Breeding these creatures for industrial and military purposes has to be economically viable," Grell notes. "If I buy a yearling colt, it's going to be another two years before I can work him and ride him, and I have to feed and support him all that time. The same thing holds true for The Blood—nobody wants to have to support these things through an extended infancy. One of the things that makes them so economically viable is that they mature at the same rate as their animal counterparts. A dog-man would grow to full size within a year, aging seven years for one human year. That makes them socially and politically acceptable—long before they can ever become a problem, they die.

"The Blood will be a continuing backstory that spreads through the entire series, and they'll go on to have their own adventures. There's also an insect-woman who goes on to breed with a human—and the offspring is very interesting. The Blood are not evil or villainous in or of themselves, but the way they are applied can have far-reaching and negative effects. They each have individual traits that make them unpredictable, and people who think they know the good guys from the bad guys may be surprised!"

Byond the first four issues of *Shaman's Tears*, Grell says he has the next year plotted out. "With the first story as a springboard, I'm going to develop antagonists for Brand out of the cast already seen, and there will be others along the way. Resentments between Brand and his childhood friend Tom, whose Indian name is Broad Arrow, slowly come to the surface, and cause problems for Joshua Brand and Stalking Wolf. Broad Arrow becomes the negative to Stalking Wolf's positive. There are alliances formed, and he'll be a major continuing character throughout the series. Watch out for Broad Arrow!"

Grell's previous career has been divided between work for the established comics companies and independents (*Starslayer* for Pacific, *Sable* for First); *Shaman's Tears* marks his first creation for Image.

"Todd McFarlane told me about Image a year before they got off the ground," he says. "I told him that

when they got ready to do some stuff, and I finished my current commitments, I would like very much to be a part of it. When he was about to launch *Spawn* a year later, we had a nice long visit, and he filled me in on what their organization wanted to accomplish. It sounded like something I wanted to be a part of, and I said I would be very interested when they were ready to launch another batch of books. One night, the phone rang and he said, 'OK, bud, you want in, you're in!' That's about all there was to it!"

one of these books into print than I ever dreamed of! I've developed new respect for everybody who does this stuff at a major publisher on a daily basis. Aside from all of that, the biggest difference is two zeroes at the end of the paycheck!"

He sees Image's creation as yet another step forward for the comics industry and for all creators.

"Image has had the same impact on comics that Pacific Comics and First Comics had. Both of them started when the situation with creators' rights wasn't very good. They were the rebels who broke away and said, 'We've got a different idea of how this can be done,' and revolutionized the comic industry. Neither of them exists any more, but whether they published one book and died quickly, or 150 books and died a slow, agonizing death, doesn't matter a single bit. The fact that we're receiving royalties for our work today can all be laid at the doorstep of companies like Pacific and First, who began doing it. Until that happened, it was impossible. And until Image happened, it was impossible for creators to reap the kind of benefits from their projects that we can now. If someone were to drop a nuclear device on Image headquarters today, the industry will still have been changed forever. There's no going back. Once people realize that there's another way of getting your projects published with a far greater monetary reward, as well as creative satisfaction, they have no reason to go back to the old way."

One of Grell's longtime collaborators—and a DC and First Comics veteran—is accompanying Grell to Image. "[Former *Green Arrow* editor] Mike Gold is editing *Shaman's Tears*, except this time, I'm giving him his paycheck," Grell laughs. "A very bizarre switch, and he's absolutely gleeful when he calls me and hammers me for a check—the shoe is really on the other foot!"

Grell says the second issue sports a very special oversized cover. A normal gatefold cover on a comic book features front and back covers that fold out to create a larger image four covers wide (such as the deluxe version of *X-Men* #1), but *Shaman's Tears* #2 also folds down, to create two rows of four comic-sized panels, all on 70-pound stock. And, the opposite side of the four-color image is another poster. "Designing the thing has been an absolute breeze," laughs Grell, "but it should be fun!"

The first four-part story includes the introduction of Brand and his world in issue #1. In the second, he realizes

A recurring theme in *Shaman's Tears* is Grell's use of copyright terminology (like Pat Pending) for characters and places.

how he has been changed forever and begins to come to terms with that change. Brand gets the stuffings kicked out of him in his conflict with *The Blood* in issue #3, and the next one contains "more shoot-'em-up, bang-bang than I've drawn in 20 years!" says Grell.

Image's newest member has extensive comics credentials. Grell (who discussed his work in CS #1 & #6) began his career assisting Dale Messick on *Brenda Starr*, and has since gone on to work in all areas of the field, from the *Tarzan* comic strip to independent creations like *Starslayer* and *Sable* (also a short-run series for ABC-TV), to mainstream comics like *Batman*, *Warlord* and (currently) *Green Arrow*. Grell is extending his scripting on *Green Arrow* for at least six more issues, up through #86, because he learned Jim (Batman) Aparo is going to pencil the book. "I had given some thought to letting it drop, but Jim has been one of my heroes for a long time, and I would do just about anything for a chance to work with him."

He also has some other projects in the works, including a proposed TV series called *Iron Mike* and two screenplays. One is a science fiction/action adventure called *Earthbound*; the other is a true story involving the siege of Stalingrad in 1943, dealing with Russia's top two snipers, Vasil Zaitsev and Tanya Chernova, and a third sniper, Major Konings. Chernova, a former ballerina and Zaitsev's lover, referred to her sniping targets as "broken sticks," so Grell is calling the

(continued on page 64)



Stalking Wolf's mission, according to Grell, "is to heal the Earth, to bring mankind back to the path of the Great Mystery, and to teach people to help themselves."

For Grell, working for Image is a new, very educational experience. "Aside from the energy and excitement of the young guys who are running Image, which just bubbles out of them, and aside from the fact that working for Image is much like being self-employed—you quit a nine-to-five job to go into business for yourself, and never get another day off for the rest of your life—there's much more work to organizing, producing and ramrodding



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DIARY OF A MAD MAN

Veteran EC artist Will Elder recalls when "Mad" was mad and Hugh Hefner was reading it.

By JOE NAZZARO

In the foyer of Will Elder's New Jersey home hangs a painting which at first glance appears to be the work of artist Norman Rockwell. The idyllic scene shows two children feeding their house plants, parents watching proudly in the background. A closer look, however, reveals that one of the plants is a gigantic Venus flytrap, and the children are gleefully holding out small animals to feed it. A box of bicarbonate of soda sits next to the hungry plant, presumably a hedge against indigestion.

Norman Rockwell? Hardly. The cunningly realistic parody is the work of artist Will Elder, best known for his work in *Mad* and for *Little Annie Fanny*, his long-running strip for *Playboy*. The painting, originally intended for the now-defunct magazine *Trump*, has been hanging in Elder's home for years. The artist is fond of recalling the time that the family doctor came to visit (back in an era when doctors were still making house calls), and the physician, a dour-

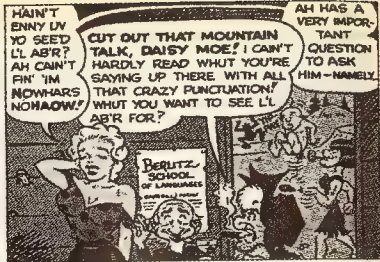


faced, elderly man, noticed the painting at the foot of the stairs. After staring at it for several moments, he sank to the floor, helpless with laughter. The physician had seen the painting many times, but had never noticed its gleefully ghoulish subject matter.

The "Rockwell" painting is a bit like the artist himself. A shy, seemingly quiet man at first, Elder allows his wonderfully wicked sense of humor to emerge slowly during conversation. His tongue-in-cheek asides ("The mailman must be outside—I can see the sun shining off his head!"), his happy retelling of child-

hood practical jokes and his honest, if irreverent, opinions indicate that there is more to Will Elder than one immediately notices.

From an early age, Elder felt he was destined for an artistic career. As a boy of 9 or 10, growing up in the Bronx, young Elder was often ignored by the bigger kids playing stickball, and would instead accept the job of scorekeeper, a role he felt was just as important. "I would keep score using chalk on the sidewalk," he remembers. "Since I was bored half the time, I would embellish the innings with caricatures of the guys playing. The



"L'il Abner wasn't an easy thing to satirize," notes Will Elder, "because it already had humor in it, and that was a challenge."

next thing I knew it was interrupting the game, stopping it cold. These guys would walk up to me, to find out what I was doing, and before I knew it, both entire teams would gather around me and say, 'Do him, Will!' or 'Let's see what I look like.' I suddenly gained this power, this eminence among these big guys, and I felt this was my road to travel."

Elder was also a master of practical jokes, although he is quick to point out that while often the instigator of these pranks, he was rarely the person who got caught. "One of the best was when I was living in this house on the third floor, and we had this old wind-up Victrola that I had salvaged from the garbage," Elder continues. "I made it workable and then cut out two figures, gluing them to the disk. I cut out this nude woman and the silhouette of this bullyish-looking man with a large knife in his hand,

and I put them on the disk, setting it on its lowest revolution. I had this large work lamp of my father's, and I threw the light upon the figures, casting a shadow on the window shade that I had just pulled down. I got out the pots and pans from my mom's cupboard, and I started banging them, making screaming noises and yelling my brains out, saying, 'Drop that knife, you brute!' and, 'Come back here! I don't want to chase you!' Meanwhile, my friends, who were shills and knew what I was doing, gathered a crowd on the street and said, 'Look, they're at it again!' Unbeknownst to myself, they called the cops. I suddenly turned around to see the bedroom door open up. In walks this large police officer, who says, 'Son, are you OK? Are you having a good time? You're starting a little riot down in the street! You had better cut it out, or we'll have to send

you down to the delinquents' court.' So, I shut up very fast."

One thing that Elder took seriously was his talent as an artist. After attending art courses in junior high school, he won a scholarship to New York's High School of Music and Art, where he found himself surrounded by other students with similar abilities and interests. This new and creative environment quickly changed his life. "I felt that I was somebody different, somebody privileged," he confirms, "to be among these very talented students. Until I graduated, that is, and then I realized it was a pretty cold and rough world out there."

"As luck would have it, I met Harvey Kurtzman on the street after graduation when he was doing freelance work, and he said, 'What are you doing, Will? Do you want to put together a studio?'" Thus, in the late '40s, Kurtzman, Elder and another artist, Charles Stern, opened their own studio, appropriately named the Charles William Harvey Studio.

"We would invite guys up to the studio who we would rent space to," Elder reminisces. "We weren't always working, so we needed their rent money to survive. It became a society, a sort of club. There were at least a half-dozen of us. Johnny Severin was

Elder's *Two-Fisted Tales* work, done with John Severin, "was kind of a filler. I hadn't found my strength yet."



Art: Copyright 1980 William M. Gaines

THE OLD PRO!



Even the pros themselves were subject to a *Mad* parody.

COMICS SCENE #35 55



"It was a unique thing," Elder says of *Little Annie Fanny*, "but it was very expensive and very time-consuming."

ally go anywhere, as far as I can remember, but then we started getting phone calls and fan mail saying it was very funny. We did satires based on the comics around at the time, and we were defaming them, in a sense, doing parodies of American comic institutions. In some ways, it was fun being blasphemous. Something had to be said, and it was an exposé of sorts. Little Orphan Annie never grew up; Daddy Warbucks never got poor, never failed at anything. Who was his mysterious creature? Why did

she have these blanked-out eyes? We looked for all the frailties in the well-known American institutions, and readers felt the same way we did. That's why it worked."

The early *Mad* stories were written by Harvey Kurtzman, who had a slightly unusual way of explaining his ideas to the artists. "Harvey would take these stories," Elder remembers, "and he would call the artists in. If it was a satire on *Ulysses*, the film with Kirk Douglas,

for example, Wally Wood's style would best befit the Roman warriors, the shields, the costumes and the period. Harvey would explain to him panel by panel what was going on, and all through the office, people would hear Harvey's voice going through the various roles he was expressing. Harvey would then call Jack Davis in, and again he would go through every role and character in the story. Jack had his own way of expressing himself, but the combination of Jack's ability to render a story plus Harvey's idea and approach made for a very popular story. The same thing with me. Harvey knew I was crazy and would throw in things on my own, so he expressed the story very simply and then said, 'Now, Willie, go home and go crazy.' That's how I would get going on the story."

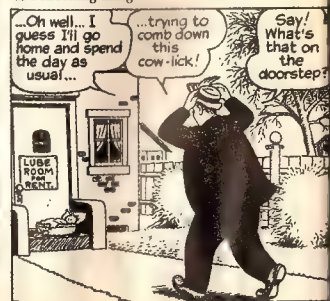
One of the trademarks of Elder's *Mad* contributions was a remarkable use of artistic mimicry. Whether lampooning a popular newspaper strip such as *Gasoline Alley*, or a comic book icon like *Archie*, Elder duplicated the original artist's style as if he had created the characters himself. "As far as my style of humor is concerned," he elaborates, "it's based on truth. Truth is making something appear authentic, and either attracting or detracting things to or from it. In order to be a good parody of something, it has to look like the real thing. If it doesn't, you have nothing to satirize. To make *Gasoline Alley* look like the actual artist drew it, and then destroy it, is a shocking thing. It's out to fool the observer; he thinks he's seeing *Gasoline Alley*, but he isn't, and that has an impact all by itself."

One assignment holds an especially proud position in Elder's memory. "L'il Abner," he selects. "For me, *L'il Abner* was really the most outstanding comic strip of that time. It had pretty girls, it had this yokel, and

"To make *Gasoline Alley* look like the actual artist drew it, and then destroy it, is a shocking thing."



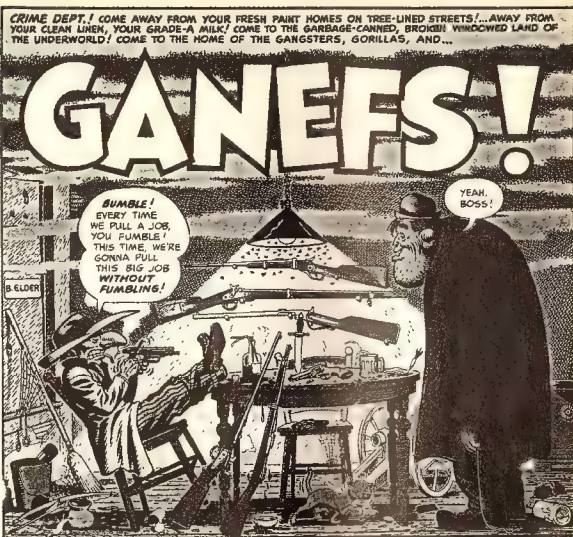
The *Frankenstein* piece "was based on the movie version, not Mary Shelley's story."



it was just ripe and ready for satire. It was a humorous strip, and you had to do something really outrageous in order to make it look ridiculous. *L'il Abner* wasn't an easy thing to satirize because it already had humor in it, and that was a challenge. It worked, and being so difficult to do, I thought it was the most successful."

Another Elder trademark was the use of multiple sight gags, which he packed into his illustrations like sardines. A typical Elder panel would feature massive amounts of puns, inside jokes and running gags—so many that the reader would have to read a story several times in order to find them all. "I had a mind full of crazy things going on," Elder confesses. "I needed some vehicle to express myself. Comics were the perfect medium. All those ideas were from my background, and all the people I knew, their virtues, their habits, the failures of their lives. Things piled up in the back of my mind, and I would put them on paper, exposing them to whatever situation was called for."

"There was our *Frankenstein* piece, which was based on the movie version, not Mary Shelley's story by any means. I put things in that had nothing to do with the movie, yet somehow became part of the story. For example, they were using the electricity from lightning, and I had a meter man looking at a meter in the basement where the experiment was being conducted. The people were very superstitious, so they would have a skate key around their neck, camphor, a four-leaf clover, a rabbit's foot; anything that would bring them luck. These are the things I would bring forth in the stories, and people who read my stuff would get a big kick out of them. It was like going through an Egyptian tomb and discovering various artifacts, and I found a great deal of pleasure in that. I think it set a precedent for other artists in *Mad*, and because of the mail we got demanding more, we found that peo-

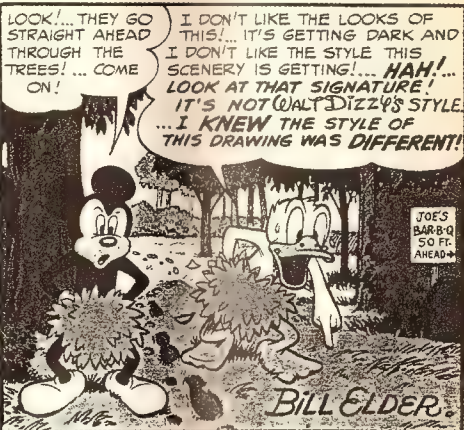


EC parodies were the cream of the crop as Elder and Kurtzman took on the popular string of crime comics.

ple really like it."

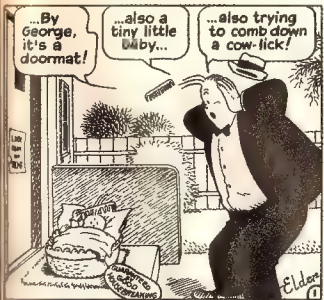
More than one *Mad* veteran has remembered Kurtzman's supposed aversion to having his stories changed by artists. "Well, I would like to contradict you there, because I would change the story," Elder protests. "Lucky for me, Harvey thought it was an improvement, and coming from Harvey, that was great. He was very masterful at writing a story, setting the mood and the climax. The climaxes were always brilliant, in my estimation. With me, whatever I did was so wild, it didn't matter if the story had a climax or not, because the climax appeared in practically every panel. I just did what I thought the story needed, and lo and behold, Harvey thought so too."

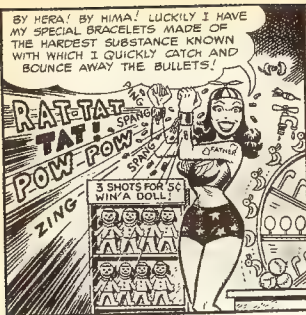
Elder also worked for *Panic*, *Mad*'s



Sight gags were a staple in any Elder piece.

short-lived sister magazine, although the artist admits that the two books were quite different. "*Panic* was similar to *Mad*, but it didn't have the same writing," he opines. "It was a little shallower than *Mad*, which was more intellectual. I'm not trying to downgrade [editor] Al Feldstein because *Mad* [the comic] had set a standard at the





Kurtzman would give detailed stories to other artists, but to Elder he simply said, "Now Willie, go home and go crazy."

time, and it was pretty hard to compete. *Panic* was a good magazine on its own, and if it hadn't been for *Mad*, it might have become something. It's like sequels—when you make *Rocky V*, it will never be *Rocky I*, no matter what. *Panic* didn't have the same classic qualities."

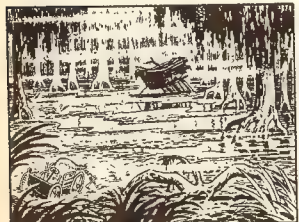
Ironically, it was in the pages of *Panic* that Elder's work created the biggest furor. In 1953, the artist illustrated a humorous version of Clement Moore's "The Night Before Christmas," and in typical Elder fashion, the story was packed with irreverent sight gags, including a "Just divorced" sign on the back of Santa's sleigh. Unfortunately, it stirred up a hornet's nest of controversy among people who failed to see the humor.

"I didn't think it would cause such

an uproar!" claims Elder. "It was blasphemous in their eyes, but not in mine. As I've said before, Santa Claus is not a religious figure. He was a political figure created by the cartoonist Thomas Nast. It didn't lend any ethical or religious insults to anybody, but some people might have interpreted it that way, because he happens to be part of Christmas. I wasn't knocking Christmas *per se*; I was knocking some things in Moore's poem that were ridiculous. He came down the chimney; how could he do that, unless he's a chimney sweep? I remembered that old song, 'I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus,' and I decided to throw that in there. People thought that was obscene, this man kissing Mommy. I was just using the words of 'The Night Before Christmas' to illustrate sight gags. I was sight-gagging it to pieces."

Elder left EC in the mid-50s to join Harvey Kurtzman on a series of new projects. Their partnership continued throughout several short-lived humor magazines, and ultimately resulted in the creation of *Little Annie Fanny* for *Playboy*. "Hugh Hefner had been looking for talent to fill the pages of *Playboy*," recalls Elder. "He had been following our work for several years. He noticed our work in *Mad*, he liked what Harvey had done and he called him up one day. They went out to lunch together, and Hefner asked him, 'How about doing a strip for *Playboy*?' He also suggested a humor magazine called *Trump*, a very slick four-color magazine that nobody had ever seen before. He tried to entice the artists from *Mad* to come over to *Trump*, and he did because Harvey was already there. I went over, and so did Jack Davis and Wally Wood. Jack went back to *Mad*, but Harvey, Wally and I remained."

"We turned out only two issues of *Trump*. It became very costly in the long run. The expenses were being drawn from Hefner's backbone magazine, *Playboy*, and finally the third issue never appeared. There

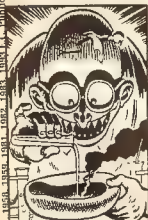


INSIDE THE SHACK, ALSO SHOPPED UP BY A BROODSTICK, WORKED THE 'PROFESSOR'!



...WORKED FRANTICALLY AMONGST HIS BUBBLING RETORTS AND TEST TUBES!

WORKED AGAINST TIME NOW THE WHOLE WORK WAS DONE! THE MIXTURE WAS READY!



...OWNING THE DRY MARTINI COCKTAIL AT ONE GULP, THE 'PROFESSOR' TURNED TO THE HUGE VAT THAT HELD THE CONCENTRATES OF A LIFETIME OF RESEARCH, BOILING AND BUBBLING...



...A RECIPE HE'D BEEN GIVEN BY THE OLD CAJON WITCH WOMAN! CROCODILES WARTS, CHOPPED UP ZOMBIE HEARTS, SHRIMPS CREOLE... A MIXTURE OF THIS SWAMP!



"I had a mind full of crazy things going on," says Elder. "I needed some vehicle to express myself. Comics were the perfect medium."

"Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou," I said, "art sure no creaver. Ghastly grin and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly shore—"



was some material already done for it; that's where the Norman Rockwell cover would have appeared. After about six or seven months, there wasn't much to do and I was looking for work. I did some work for a video/TV company for about a year, but then business got bad, and I was back on the dole again.

"I ran into Harvey, and he had just gotten an offer from Hefner to come draw a comic strip for *Playboy*—something sensuous, adorable, not too smart but not too dumb either, sort of a Marilyn Monroe/Brigitte Bardot character. Hefner had also seen our *Goodman Beaver* book [an earlier strip featuring a wide-eyed innocent character, a cross between Candide and Archie] with the *Playboy* takeoff, and he was enthralled with it. He thought it was a great satire, and he said, 'How about drawing something in color for *Playboy* every month, if you can handle it?' I started experimenting around with a character based on Marilyn Monroe, and that's how *Little Annie Fanny* was born."

Elder discovered very quickly that *Little Annie Fanny* was a monumental piece of work, too demanding to be turned out every month. "Considering the layout, redrawing, gags, coloring, editing and sometimes the corrections, each story took two or three months. If we turned out two or three stories per year, we were lucky. It was a unique thing, but it was also very expensive and very time-consuming. It was the first story where we turned out a complete three-page strip in full color, rendered like a painting.

"Eventually, the stories became few and far between. They weren't accepting every story, and new editors kept coming in who were hypercritical. Harvey would work very hard turning out stories, and a lot of them got rejected. We were getting paid per story, and if they weren't accepted, we weren't paid. Ultimately, it dried up on the vine."

Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's
Plutonian shore!"

Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."



NEWSPAPER CARTOON DEPT.: ONE THING THAT GETS US ABOUT THE CARTOON WORLD IS... YOU HAVE THESE STRONG GUYS... NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS... NO MATTER HOW BAD THINGS ARE... NO MATTER WHAT... WHO... NOW... WHO... WHO... NOW... HA... WHO... NA-WHO... WHO-NA... THESE GUYS WIND UP BEING THE STRONGEST... LIKE FOR INSTANCE... TAKE THIS GUY...



"In order to be a good parody of something, it has to look like the real thing," Elder says concerning his artistic mimicry.

Despite the difficulties, Elder cites the positive aspects he encountered in drawing the strip. "We satirized things that were politically ripe at the time, and that gave us pleasure because we were rapping things that needed to be examined and criticized more closely," the artist reflects. "Annie Fanny was a prop to run these things through. Either it was a political convention, or a Miss America contest, or the pro-lifers; there were some satires on television violence, as well as some of the running serials on TV. The strip was the background for all these satires, and it held up until we started to find ourselves doing the same things. There was a Miss America every year, but we could only do that once, so it eventually petered out."

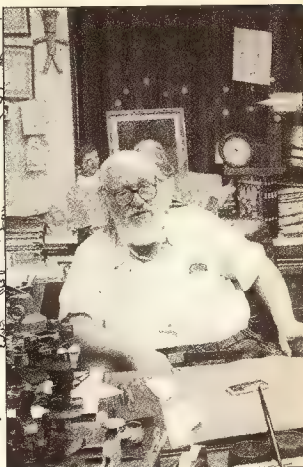
After the last *Little Annie Fanny* was published in the late '80s, Kurtzman and Elder found work doing movie posters and illustrations. The two men parted company when Elder began suffering a venal occlusion—a bursting of the blood vessels in the eye. "I couldn't concentrate on work," he comments. "That dictated my future, which was to cure this thing or clear it up. It took about a year-and-a-half, and then I decided to

go into semi-retirement. I take some work on commission, and that's it."

Today, Elder spends much of his time painting, a medium he enjoys experimenting with. His house is filled with family portraits, done in a loose, impressionistic style that's a far cry from his carefully detailed illustrations of the past. Asked whether any artists today may have followed in his footsteps, the artist hesitates. "I'm sure there are artists out there who have a great sense of humor and just have to be directed," he ventures. "Some of the people at *Mad* are still very funny for this genre and this generation. Why not? Every generation has its own type of humor that's popular for its time. I'm not a fan, really. I'm doing things that are entirely different, trying to break into new avenues of art and creativity. I like to do some painting and try to apply whatever technique I used in my work for *Mad* as a means of developing the finer part of the art. That's what I'm involved with now."

Unlike many, Will Elder knows how he would like to be remembered. "As an artist who could cartoon, could illustrate, and at the same time was gifted with some sense of humor," he shrugs. "I made people laugh a little, gave a little pleasure to my readers. I got the most satisfaction out of that."

No one was safe from the pencil of Will Elder, not even Edgar Allan Poe.



William Gaines was a comics legend.

LAST WORDS

In what may have been his final interview, William M. Gaines offers a poignant look at his EC days.

By MARK VOGER

William M. Gaines was a comics legend, leading EC Comics from its educational origins to the horrifying days confronting Senate Sub-Committees and censorious psychologists. Later, he turned his comic book *Mad* (ramrodded by Harvey Kurtzman) into a magazine, an institution and a state of mind.

Often interviewed by comics historians, Gaines discussed his career in 1991 for *CS* #21. A later talk was published in *CS SPECTACULAR* #7 (on sale in July 1992). Granted in spring 1992, the interview was, literally, going to press the day Gaines died, June 3, 1992. It was, apparently, his last interview.

With Gaines' passing, everything he said during that final discussion took on a deeper meaning and a greater resonance. But as usual with magazine publishing, not everything Gaines said had actually been published in *CS* #7, due to space limitations. For the record, then, these are the unpublished

outtakes from that interview, more of the last words of William M. Gaines.

COMICS SCENE: What was the atmosphere like at the EC Comics office? Who was in the office the most, who was in the least?

WILLIAM GAINES: The office was mostly Al [Feldstein] and I, and some girls taking care of the subs. And Mr. [Frank] Lee, the business manager. Paul Kast, who worked summers as an office boy doing anything. Artists came in occasionally, bringing in their stories, picking up new ones. We always had a story ready for the guy when he came in, so we kept him 100 percent busy. The atmosphere was jovial.

CS: Not as zany as *Mad*?

GAINES: No, not that mad, but fun.

CS: Reading the EC stories written with Al Feldstein, one is surprised at how ingenious some of them are. For example, one story has the kids walking through town with the coffin, and all of the neighbors saying, "Oh, isn't that cute—a mock funeral!" Are there

Calvin's face grew grim as he turned to his chef...

"I HATE UGLY AND HORRIBLE CREATURES! HORRIBLE CREATURES SHOULD DIE HORRIBLY!"

"A LOBSTER IS A LIVING THING, MR. DUGAN. NO LIVING THING SHOULD BE MADE TO SUFFER."



Though an "unhappy man" according to Gaines, Graham Ingels produced well-developed "ghastly" art for the comics.

any EC horror stories that you're particularly proud of, that could stand up in any genre?

GAINES: Oh, there are many of them. The proof of the pudding is the *Tales from the Crypt* show [on HBO]. Many of my favorites—and non-favorites—have appeared there. Sometimes they enhance them, sometimes they screw 'em up, but by and large they treat them pretty regularly.

CS: Were you pleased with the Amicus British anthology film versions of *Tales from the Crypt* and *The Vault of Horror*?

GAINES: Not completely. First of all, I had script approval, which they didn't give me. They did many things I didn't like. I told them I didn't like it. They did it anyway, which is why I stopped working with them after two pictures.



As familiar as the magazine's name, Alfred E. Neuman has become a sultan of satire.



Art: Graham Ingels

CS: The imitators that came out after your horror mags began to sell—did you feel that they ruined the fun? Were they gorier with flimsier content? Did you read them?

GAINES: We never read them. They couldn't have gotten much gorier than we were. Except that our gore was mitigated by the fact that it had a good story to go with it. And theirs probably didn't.

CS: But did you sense that without so many imitators, you would have lasted longer?

GAINES: Sure, there wouldn't have been so much public attention.

CS: The few 3-D books you put out were a rare instance of EC following the pack instead of being imitated. How did you obtain the 3-D formula?

GAINES: We didn't exactly follow the pack. The St. John people came up with this stuff. We went there and we were the only people in the entire

comics industry who actually paid money to get the process. But meanwhile, I had independently discovered their process, which they had taken from an old gent named Freeman H. Owens. I went through old patents in the library, found the patents and Feldstein found Freeman H. Owens through a series of phone calls. He kept moving around—but we finally found him. We called him and said, "Hey, we would like to license this from you." And he said [in a creaky voice], "I was wondering when you would call!" [Laughs] He was an old, crack-voiced guy. We paid him. And we withdrew our license from St. John—Owens had the original idea, not them. This took time. We worked slowly. By the time we got our two books out, there were 10 million others. But we never thought of it as following the pack.

CS: How did those books sell?

GAINES: Terrible. By the time we got out, there were so many 3-Ds on the stands that nothing was selling.

CS: They were actually redrawn from scratch, weren't they?

GAINES: They had to be.

CS: By the late '50s and early '60s, anthology TV shows like *The Twilight Zone* and *The Outer Limits* seemed very similar to the EC stories. Do you agree?

GAINES: I didn't watch them, so I don't know. For five years, we lived horror and science fiction. We were so saturated. When we stopped writing it, we stopped reading it.

CS: When the New York legislature kept passing bills against horror



Crypt Photo: Ken Sax/HRO

"By and large," Gaines said of HBO's *Tales from the Crypt*, "they treat them [the original stories] pretty regular."

Art: Jack Davis



To Gaines, Jack Davis was the "sweetest guy you could ever meet."

comics, and Governor Thomas Dewey kept vetoing them, do you have any idea why Dewey was so sympathetic?

GAINES: He wasn't exactly sympathetic. It's just that he felt that this was a violation of freedom of speech. He was adamant that no censorship laws should pass under his aegis.

CS: You tell the story of testifying before the Senate Subcommittee on juvenile delinquency, and losing your mental edge after the diet pills you were taking at the time wore off. If you had had another tab of dexedrine, would you have fared better in that infamous debate with Senator Estes Kefauver over Johnny Craig's beheading scene on the *Crime Suspensories* #22 cover?

GAINES: Oh, I think so.

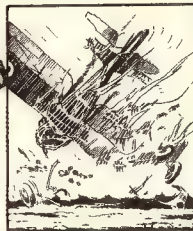
10,000 FEET AND FALLING LIKE AN
ONION PEEL? STILL, HE MANAGED
TO LEVEL OFF INTO A GLIDE...



...STOKING THE GROUND AT THE SPEED
OF 60 KNOTS. EVERYTHING BREAKING
INTO TOOTHPICKS...THEN REBOUNDED...



...AT A 45° ANGLE, THEN SCORING 180
DEGREES. FEET MORE WHERE THE SPAD FINALLY
HIT THE GROUND...



George Evans "keeps pluggin' along, doing beautiful work."

Art: George Evans

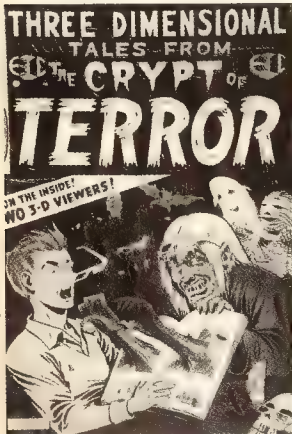
Art: Will Elder



Of Will Elder, Gaines recalls that he was "a crazy nut."

Art: Will Elder, Gaines recalls that he was "a crazy nut."

Layart & Design: Len F. Leake



Going to the original 3-D source, EC published the effects but arrived too late in the game to sell well.

Art: Al Feldstein/Courtesy Mark Vagar

Word Association

During that last interview, William M. Gaines was asked (as he had been by other journalists) to assess his EC colleagues. It was a game of word association. As each EC staffer was named, Gaines gave his top-of-the-head thoughts, commenting on his old friends and employees, not so much as artists, but as people.

Al Feldstein: "Brilliant editor, great writer. As far as he went with me, he did wonderfully. Finally, he felt that *Mad* was on the way out, so he left."

Johnny Craig: "Always a doll. Very slow, meticulous and talented. I just saw him recently. He's as sweet and nice as ever."

Graham Ingels: "An unhappy man

CS: In *Seduction of the Innocent*, Dr. Fredric Wertham shows panels and covers of EC comics. Did he obtain permission from you?

GAINES: No.

CS: Did you feel a bit of indignation over that? It seems actionable.

GAINES: [Laughs] Of all the things he did, that was the thing that I felt the least indignation about. If a guy is going to attack you, he's going to use your stuff.

CS: Is it true that you yourself were the impetus behind forming the committee that you eventually walked out on, which became the Comics Code Authority?

GAINES: Yes. Lyle Stuart and I formed the committee, called them to the first meeting, paid for the hall, arranged for the people to come.... We were speaking to them and trying to convince them that they could do a public relations job, and get psychiatrists to actually do research in the field. That was my whole thing here. And they threw that whole concept out to form a censorship committee with Judge Murphy, similar

who ran away from his family, and for the last many years of his life, was in hiding in Lantana, Florida. Since he's dead now, I can tell you where he lived. All these years, I wouldn't tell anybody because Graham preferred it that way."

Jack Davis: "Talent drips from his fingers. Sweetest guy you could ever meet. Just the nicest, sweet, gentle, kindly, funny soul. He is in semi-retirement in the middle of nowhere down in Georgia next to a golf course."

Jack Kamen: "Happy-go-lucky, typical salesman type who would come in and say, 'Hey, have you heard the latest joke?' Very delightful man. He's leading a happy retirement in his numerous homes."

Wally Wood: "Like a leprechaun. A funny little guy. Full of fun. But also

full of unhappiness—and he ultimately killed himself."



"A very talented artist. One of our top SF artists." Gaines said of Al Williamson.

full of unhappiness—and he ultimately killed himself."

Joe Orlando: "Another leprechaun. A wonderful guy. Still at DC, doing very nicely. Been a friend for many years."

George Evans: "A wonder. He just keeps pluggin' along, doing beautiful work. I see him every now and then. He lives in Pennsylvania not far from one of my daughters. We dig him up every couple of years and go to dinner with him. He and his wife are healthy and delightful."

Al Williamson: "A funny guy. A very talented artist. For years, he preferred only doing a certain kind of art. He would have others do backgrounds and things for him that he found boring. He has had one success after another—one of our top science-fiction

Art: Al Williamson



The EC offices may not have been as mad as *Mad*, but "the atmosphere was jovial."

to the Judge Hays thing for the movies, when the Fatty Arbuckle debacle exploded and almost ruined Hollywood.

CS: So, you must have found this ironic. You organized, paid—then wound up walking out.

GAINES: I found it ironic [laughs]. Not surprising.

CS: Of the old EC gang, are most of them still alive? Wood, Ingels and Krigstein are gone.

GAINES: Well, we had a couple of good scriptwriters towards the end. Al and I got tired. We had two guys: Carl Wessler and Jack Oleck [who novelized the *Amicus* movies]—very fine writers. They have both died. Jack some time ago, and Carl recently. And then Jack's widow died, too. I send money every year. From the old stuff—I send it to these guys. I've been doing it all these years. When they die, I send

artists. A very nice fella."

Bernie Krigstein: "A crotchety old son of a bitch, but a wonderful talent. He turned into a fine artist after he left."

Reed Crandall: "Reed came with us late. He was already well-established before he walked in. I said, 'Reed, what took you so long?' Because we never sought anybody out. They came to us. He finally walked in, and we were all delighted, because he was such a wonderful craftsman."

Will Elder: "A crazy nut. He and his wife Jeannie are doing fine in semi-retirement."

John Severin: "Left us early. He's doing well, the top man with *Cracked*. I wish to hell we had him [at *Mad*]. Very nice guy. Very conservative, very patriotic, lovely wife and he's happily

ON AUGUST 9, 1945... A SUNNY DAY... CITIZENS OF NAGASAKI, JAPAN, HEARD A RADIO WARNING!... ENEMY PLANES OVER SHIMABARA HEADING WEST!... AT 11:03 A.M., CITIZENS OF NAGASAKI HEARD THE VRRROOW OF A B-29 BANKING OVERHEAD... AND IT WAS THE LAST THING THEY HEARD BEFORE BEING BLOWN TO ETERNITY BY THE



One of the more popular EC artists, Wally Wood was "a funny little guy. Full of fun."

it to the widows. I still send Wessler's money to him. Ingels' money goes to his daughter. After Oleck's wife died, his family said they didn't want the money anymore, which I thought was strange, but OK. Everybody else is alive and kicking as far as I know.

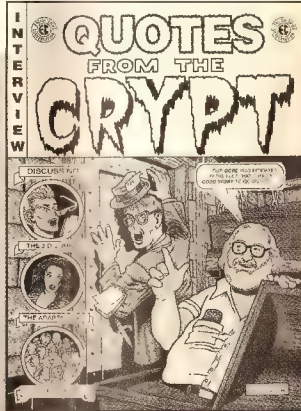
CS: Readers, of course, can't as readily spot who wrote which stories as we can who drew them.

GAINES: Well, it was mostly Al and I. Al wrote them. Al and I plotted them. Except for Johnny Craig stories, where he wrote them and Craig and I plotted them. In the Kurtzman books, he wrote

them all. Later on, the last year or so, we started using Wessler and Oleck.

CS: What did you think of the Warren magazines of the '60s, *Creepy* and *Eerie*? They used many EC artists and went out without the CCA seal.

GAINES: Well, the stories weren't up to our stuff, but the art was. Of course, they used our artists. They used Al Williamson, George Evans and maybe Joe Orlando—guys we weren't using anymore. I was happy they got work. (S)



out in Denver. I guess Marie [Severin] doesn't see as much of him as she would like to. He's the big brother."

Marie Severin: "Ah, Marie! Marie was a delight, another leprechaun. Our only censor. If Marie didn't like something, she painted it dark purple. A wonderful colorist. On something she wanted to color, she colored it brilliantly."

Harvey Kurtzman: "Genius. We've had a couple of falling-outs, but these things happen. Harvey and I have two different memories of a number of events which he remembers one way and I remember another. Of course, he's wrong and I'm right, because he has a terrible memory and I have a good memory. But no one ever questioned his genius."

—Mark Voger

Robinson

(continued from page 46)

wanted it to be in the first issue, but they said Bill was better equipped to write the first story. I had to agree, but I tell you—and this is the absolute truth—there were tears in my eyes when I said, 'OK, Bill, write the story.' It was like taking my baby away.

"That's how it happened. Bill wrote the first story. I loved Bill, and he was a very close friend—I had no resentment whatsoever, except that I wanted to do it. But he wrote a great first story—he used the plot of a closed-room [murder mystery], which perfectly epitomized the Joker's thinking and his whole persona."

Today, Robinson says he has no idea what sort of story he might have scripted, had he been allowed to pen the Joker's first appearance.

"I didn't know what story I was going to write. Bill came up with the plot. I was going to go back and write the first story, but at the meeting, Bill took over and wrote it," he says.

Robinson says Conrad Veidt's character from *The Man Who Laughs* has become part of the story of the Joker's creation in recent years. "I don't know whose version that is, but what happened was, when I first showed Bob the sketch of the Joker—and this was the first time either Bill or Bob saw the Joker, this drawing that I brought into that first meeting—Bill said, 'That reminds me of the whole concept of the clown in *The Man Who Laughs*, with Conrad Veidt.'

"Now, neither Bob nor I knew Conrad Veidt or *The Man Who Laughs*. Bill was really the intellectual. He had gone to all of the foreign movies, the Museum of Modern Art. He became my mentor; he took me to the museums, to the foreign art stores. The next day, when he was writing that story, he attached a picture of Veidt to flesh it out for us and help us visualize it.

"That was typical of Bill Finger. He would do that with all of his scripts. Whatever he was writing about, he would add all the research that he dug up while writing the story. If he was writing a fight scene on a ship, he would do the research and get the whole layout of the ship, so the sequence would work—Batman would be on deck, and he would be able to swing down on this or that. Bill would then attach the visuals he had dug up as research—literally attach them to the script. And that's what he did with Conrad Veidt."

NEXT ISSUE: More on the Joker, Robinson's role in the first Penguin stories and secret origins. **CA**

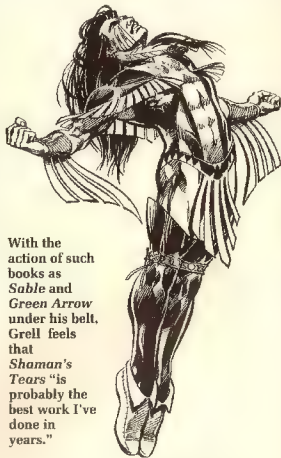
Shaman

(continued from page 51)

screenplay *Sticks*. He's also working with Robin of Sherwood actor/writer Mark Ryan (STARLOG #166) on a proposed comics series called *The Hooded Man*, a variation on the Robin Hood myth.

After decades in the comics field, Grell still remains excited about it.

"Because I do my own scripts and create my own storylines, it stays as fresh as my imagination," he says. "As long as I have something to work on that fires up my imagination, I can get really excited about it. I've shown bits and pieces of *Shaman's Tears* to a number of people. I have to say that the reaction has been very positive, and I feel it's probably the best work I've done in many years. It's probably as good as anything I ever did while I



With the action of such books as *Sable* and *Green Arrow* under his belt, Grell feels that *Shaman's Tears* "is probably the best work I've done in years."

was doing *Sable*, and I regard *Sable* as my best work today."

Shaman's Tears excites Mike Grell in part because of his interest in Native American culture and wildlife, but it's the characters that keep him around. "The opportunity to draw a whole lot of critters running around in interesting landscapes is a strong factor," he says. "But, you can't sell a book based on pretty pictures of interesting-looking animals. It must have a story and characters that people will care about. Over the years, I've discovered that characterization is not just an important thing, it's *everything*, if you're going to make the story live. I've had more joy in my work in this particular book than I have had in years. Every panel is a new challenge."

Gregory

(continued from page 19)

"You mean, is Gregory drawn from my own life?" he asks at one point. "Uhh...yeah. Not literally, of course: I've never spent time in an asylum. And I hardly ever wear straitjackets. Only on dates."

"Gregory is *metaphorically* or *parabolically* based on my life and experiences," he continues, with just the hint of having discussed this topic before. "It's about fear and feeling powerless, and accepting yourself the way you are even though you're a little bit weird. As a child I was always an outcast, and I have always felt just a little bit abnormal. So, much of my early self-image plays into this character. I didn't talk much, either, let me tell you."

Curiously enough, the talkative white rodent Wendell also greatly resembles Gregory. "Well, a little bit. He has Gregory's eyes," Hempel concedes, though not recognizing any further connection. "The characters just pop up as I need them, and they sometimes disappear as I don't need them."

Gregory has found a following. And while there's no reliable way to know exactly who reads a comic, Hempel's informal assessment, from fan mail and the people he meets at signings and conventions, indicates a span from teenagers to thirtysomethings. And quite a few are female, an unusual statistic for a comic.

"I find that heartening, given that the market at the moment seems geared toward 12-year-old males," Hempel says. "Maybe it's the girl friends of comics buffs. I don't know. But somehow they find it."

Until you've seen Gregory, the scenario doesn't sound like something you would want to read. Somehow the scripts' irreverence added to Gregory's witless innocence equals something greater than their sum. "He never cries, did you notice that?" Hempel asks, as if having met Gregory rather than created him. The little lunatic's cheerfulness, Hempel believes, is what keeps his funny-farm adventures from becoming grim: If no one tried to reform him, Gregory would be a pretty content person.

"I definitely make Gregory more childlike as a character, not to be cuter on the surface level but to be more endearing," Marc Hempel concludes, "to make you relate to him as a kid. Originally, I drew him as an adult, or at least in adult proportions, kind of gangly, and the effect just wasn't there. The body didn't fit his personality. That's what changed when I redrew him for the first book. At this point, I don't know what he is. People find compassion in him and relate to him; that's all that matters." **CA**

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Crisis

(continued from page 14)

and Marvel has been on top for a long time. Many observers feel that Marvel is overextending itself, that it doesn't have the creative talent to support such a massive line, that its core readership is dissatisfied and looking elsewhere.

After a less-than-impressive start, Marvel's U.K. line is doing its best to make the New Universe look like a stroke of genius. Once the younger readers decided that the Wolverine of Marvel U.K. isn't the "real" Wolverine, fans began staying away in droves, despite attempts to revamp their whole approach. So why is it being kept on life support? Because it's taking up plenty of space on comic racks. Also, since Marvel U.K. is a completely separate legal entity from the Marvel Entertainment Group, there's a very lucrative licensing agreement at stake here. Someone will be making lots of money—in the short term. They can try to lessen the damage by publishing

most of them as limited series, long after the fans have caught on. Marvel will likely maintain U.S. publication of the U.K. line long enough for them to shoot themselves in the foot. By overexposing its most popular characters, Marvel may be in danger of boring readers.

Remember when crossovers were special events? Once upon a time, it was possible for fans to buy every Marvel title every month; today, it's becoming financially prohibitive to buy every Spidey guest-shot. Once fans realize they can live without every Punisher appearance, it's going to be easy for them to cut back more and more. And, when the dust settles, Marvel's readership may continue to erode—unlike the past, fans can choose from plenty of alternatives. Marvel doesn't have a huge corporation like Time-Warner looking out for their interests, either. Marvel's toy licenses and *X-Men* cartoon have succeeded, but the company has been continually embarrassed in attempts to produce a successful superhero feature film.

costly, and if they don't increase sales, companies will lose interest fast.

The other, much more serious victims of the Bloodbath may be newer, smaller comics shops trying to find their way through the glut. Retailers who've been selling comics for 20 years don't know how to order for their stores this summer—what chance does a newcomer have? Store owners who guess wrong have always had to suffer the consequences, but this year, the odds of avoiding the comics that won't sell, and ordering enough of the comics that will, are steeper than ever. And, some comics shops will be put out of business.

Comics shop owners are already well aware of the big difference between Coca-Cola and comic books. If their Coca-Cola doesn't sell, they can return it. In the direct sales market, comics are *not* returnable. A supermarket can order all the Coke they want for a special promotion or the hot summer sales period and sell what they can, then return the unsold portion after it's over. A comics store can't do this. If it over-orders, it's stuck with hundreds of copies of *Kickers, Inc. #1*. Of course, comics shops get a greater discount, but the direct system provides a strong incentive for shops to order only what they know they can sell, taking no chances, and often limiting the variety of stuff each store offers (and even sticking with the "safe" stuff is no guarantee—just ask the shop owners holding hundreds and thousands of copies of *X-Men #1* that they can't get rid of at less than cover price).

What can readers do? You've probably heard it all before, but it's worth repeating.

Buy only those comics you enjoy.

Don't buy multiple copies, unless you're giving them to friends who will read them, or you're trying to support some of the endangered publishers—you have a better chance of winning the lottery than becoming rich by selling your comics collection.

Avoid gimmicks. If a company offers you a choice between the same comic with or without cover enhancements, choose the regular cover and save some money.

Don't encourage substandard art and stories with your money. A sympathetic comics shop owner may let you glance at the interiors of the books before you buy (that's *glance*—don't abuse the courtesy).

It's just common sense, really. If enough comic buyers act intelligently, everybody will win, and the comics field will be the stronger for it. Don't believe the hype; support the comics you truly feel are *worth* supporting.

Get those wallets ready, comics fans; it's going to be a bumpy summer.

There may be two more casualties of the summer's Bloodbath, one lucky and the other very unfortunate.

Cover gimmicks and polybagged comics are faced with growing resentment and anger by fans and retailers. Originally, gimmicks were utilized to sell more comics at higher prices (mostly through multiple unit sales to single consumers). The bandwagon effect resulted in a mini-glut of spiffy-looking embossed/chromium/holographic covers and titles bagged with trading cards, posters and other souvenirs. Fans are getting agitated with higher prices, and upset at having to cut open their polybags to read their comics (because, naturally, they're no longer in hallowed mint condition) and coerced into buying multiple copies so that at least one will be "mint." Publishers go right on wailing and moaning, begging the kids to "Tear open those bags and read 'em, for gosh sakes!," all the while knowing that the kids will have to buy multiple copies to service the collector mentality they have so encouraged. The kids are beginning to respond with "So don't put them in the bags in the first place, or we won't buy 'em at all!"

Ultimately, if the gimmicks stop selling extra comics, they'll stop making them. There are indications that the readers have had enough (and there are also reports that comics left in bags will deteriorate and yellow at an accelerated rate, because of the cheapness of the vinyl. Why do you think they're labeled "recyclable"?). Gimmicks are time-consuming and

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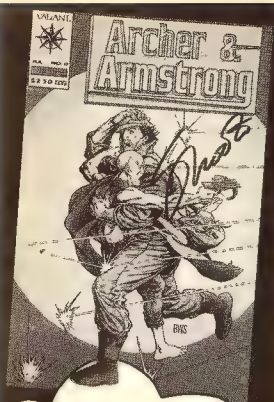
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Dennis

(continued from page 24)

CS: Did you have any acting lessons before your audition?

GAMBLE: No. I just did the best I could.

CS: I'll let you go in a minute or so, but I wanted to ask you if you taught anybody else anything during the movie.

GAMBLE: No. Nothing. I'm sorry, nothing. I didn't teach them anything! [Bell rings] That's the doorbell! I wonder who that is? Oh, it's UPS.

CS: Are things a lot busier around your house since you did the movie?

GAMBLE: Uh-huh.

CS: You shot most of it around Chicago. What was your favorite location?

GAMBLE: The woods where they first build the tree house. A real woods. Was that the question you wanted to end it with?

CS: No, I'm sorry, I guess I got side-tracked by the UPS man.

GAMBLE: OK, what did you want to end it with?

CS: Are you getting tired of doing this interview?

GAMBLE: I'm getting a cramp in the back of my neck.

CS: Well, we can't have that. Get yourself comfortable here.

GAMBLE: [Moves slightly, slides off CS's lap] But now I'm out of the shot! [climbs back] There we go!

CS: OK, did you have fun doing Dennis? Do you want to do another one?

GAMBLE: Yeah! Then that would be the second movie I've starred in! And then, four more! I'll probably do Dennis the Menace 3, and The Ending of Dennis the Menace. And then, probably, Dennis Comes Back to Life. And then, I'll be a movie star.

CS: What else did you want to say before we finish? What did I not ask you about?

GAMBLE: Are you from any newspaper, or what are you doing here?

CS: No, I'm from STARLOG and COMICS SCENE magazines.

GAMBLE: I think I heard of those. I heard of the COMICS magazine, but not STARLOG.

CS: Well, I'll give you copies before I leave. Thanks for doing the interview, Mason!

GAMBLE: No problema, dude!

CS: Was this your first interview?

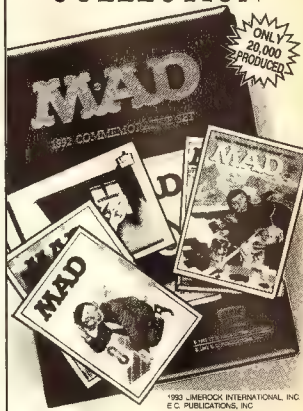
GAMBLE: Well, I had a few practice interviews, but this is my first real one. CS: How did it go? Were you happy with it?

GAMBLE: Good. Yes, very happy.

CS: Did I do a good job?

GAMBLE: [Exasperated] I don't know! You'll have to ask your boss that. Bye, everybody!

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COMICS screen

All of these upcoming projects are live-action unless specified. Those boxed are new or updated since last listing. Not everything listed will ultimately ever be made. Legend: S: script; D: director; P: producer; EP: executive producer; C: creator; AN: animated; LA: live-action; Syn: syndicated; HB: Hanna-Barbera; Nel: Nelvana; RH: Rankin Bass; WD: Warner Bros.; PP: Paramount; U: Universal; DH: Duck Horse; L: Largo; Col: Columbia; Lor: Lorimar; Am: Amblin; FF: Fantasybook Films; RS: Ruby-Spears; Attn: all pros. Info to be added to this list is cheerfully invited. Send to COMICS SCENE, 475 Park Ave. South, 8th Fl. NY, NY 10016-6989 (Info as of 4/16/93)

Addams Family, Sequel. PP. *Addams Family Values.* PP. W/ movie cast & Carol Kane. AN series. ABC. HB.

The Airtight Garage. AN. D: Moebius, Stephan Martiniere. S: Randy Lofficier. Alias. Film. U. S: David S. Goyer. P: P. Lenkov, S: Daniel.

ALIENS vs. Predator. Film. DH/Fox.

The American. Film. DH/L. **Animaniacs.** AN syn TV. WB/Am. Fall '93.

Annie. Film. *Annie & the Castle of Terror.* D: Lewis Gilbert. Rastar. Stage musical sequel delayed.

Archie. LA Film. S: N. & D. Epsilon. DIC.

COMICS REPORTER



In another part of the forest, Jessica & Roger Rabbit and Baby Herman face danger and desire (under the elms) in the all-new Maroon Cartoon, "Trail Mix-Up."

Barbarella. LA film. Nel. **Batman.** AN series. Direct-to-video. AN film.

Betty Boop. AN film. S: Jerry Rees. EP: R. Fleischer. R. Zanuck. MGM.

The Black Cat. Film. ☐ **Blankman.** Film. C: Damon Wayans, Eric Gold. Sony. **Black Panther.** Film.

W/Wesley Snipes. D: John Singleton. Sony.

Blade. Film. **Blondie.** Film. WB. **Bonkers D. Bobcat.** Syn AN series. WD. Fall '93.

☐ **Cadillacs & Dinosaurs.** AN series. Nel. Pilot S: Steven de Souza.

Casper. Film. Am. U.

Concrete. Film. DH. ☐ **The Crow.** Film. Completion & release delayed due to star Brandon Lee's death.

Crusader Rabbit. AN TV. **Cyberpunk.** Film. S: Steve Roberts. D: Rene Marzor.

Deadworld. Film. S: Mark Pavia (D). Jack O'Donnell (P).

☐ **Dennis the Menace.** Film. P/S: John Hughes. D: Nick Castle. WB. (see article)

Dinosaurs for Hire. AN series. Fox.

Dr. Strange. Film. S/D: Wes Craven. Savoy Ent.

Doom's IV. Film. P/S: Rob Liefeld. Am.

Duckman. AN. C: Everett Peck. Klasky Csupo.

Dudley Do-Right. Film. U. **Elektra Assassin.** Film. TriStar.

Exosquad. AN TV series. U. W/ Robby Benson. Fall bow.

☐ **Family Dog.** AN specials. Airing on CBS.

Fantastic Four. Film. ☐ **Faust.** Film. S: Stuart Gordon.

Flaming Carrot. Film. ☐ **The Flintstones.** Film. Fred: John Goodman. Barney: Rick Moranis. Wilma: Elizabeth Perkins. Betty: Rosie O'Donnell. U/Am. D: Brian Levant. S: Jim Jennewein, Tom Parker, Gary Ross. P: Bruce Cohen, Colin Wilson. Lensing. Two AN TV specials. ABC.

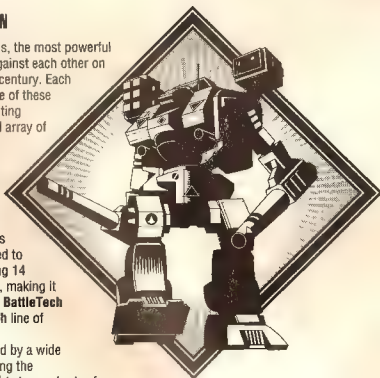
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G.I. Joe. Film. S/D: Sheldon Lettich. WB.
The Green Falcon. TV. Am.
☐ **The Green Hornet.** Film. S: Chuck Pfarrer. U.
☐ **Incredible Hulk.** Film. U.
Iron Man. Film.
Judge Dredd. Film.
☐ **Kull.** Film. U. S: Charles Pogue.
The Lion King. AN film. WD. Nov. '94.
Lone Wolf & Cub. Film. D: John Bruno. S: Bill Wisher.
Mai the Psychic Girl. Film.
☐ **The Mantis.** Fox TV. U. EP: Sam Raimi, Sam Hamm.
The Mask. Film. New Line. S/D: Chuck Russell.
The Men in Black. Film. Col. P: Walter Parkes, Laurie McDondal.
Mr. Magoo. Film. Am/WB.
☐ **Model by Day.** TV movie.
☐ W/ Famke Janssen. S/P: J. Loeb II, M. Weisman. D: Christian Duguay.
Pagemaster. AN/LA film. Fox/HB. 1994 release.
Paparazzi Samurai. AN TV series. P: DIC, Abrams/Gentile.
Peanuts. LA film. P/S: John Hughes. WB.
The Phantom. Film. PP. Targeted for 1994.
Plastic Man. Film. WB/Am.
S: L. Wilson. D: B. Spicer.
Pocahontas. AN film. WD. Spring '94.



Once Upon a Forest. Edgar the mole, Abigail the wood mouse and Russell the hedgehog race into danger in the all-new Hanna-Barbera animated feature due for June release.

Prince Valiant. AN series.
Family Chan. LA film. S: M. Beckner. N. Constantin Film.
☐ **The Princess & the Goblin.** AN film. Due out spring.
Reid Sonja. TV. Lancit.
Reid Fleming. Film.
S: creator David Boswell.
P: M. Weisman, J. Loeb II.
Richie Rich. Film. P: J. Silver, J. Davis. S: Neil Tolkien.
RoboCop 3. S: Frank Miller & Fred Dekker (D). Summer.

Rupert the Bear. AN. Nel.
The Saint. Film. P: Robert Evans. S: Jeff Boam. PP.
Sandman. Film.
Sgt. Rock. Film. P: Joel Silver, Bob Zemeckis. WB.
The Shadow. Film. S: David Koepp. P: Martin Bregman. D: Russell Mulcahy. W/ Alec Baldwin. Films July.
Speed Racer. AN TV series. Fred Wolf Films. Fall '93 bow.
Film. D: Patrick Read Johnson.

S: John Lawton. WB.
Spider-Man. Film. S/D: Jim Cameron. Summer '95.
Starwatcher. AN film. D: Moebius, Pino van Lams- weerde. S: Moebius, J. Frysman, J. L. Fromental. PP.
☐ **Superman.** TV series. ABC. Superman: Dean Cain. Lois: Teri Hatcher. S: Deborah Joy Levine.
☐ **Tales from the Crypt- Keeper.** AN half-hour TV series in development.
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. AN series. CBS. S. N. **Terry & the Pirates.** TV.
Time Cop. Film. D: Sam Raimi. DH/L.
Tom & Jerry. AN film. P/D: Phil Roman. Summer.
Trouble with Girls. Film. Fox/FF. S: W. Jacobs, G. Jones.
We're Back. AN film. Am/U. Fall '93.
Wild Cards. Film. Disney.
Wizard of Id. Film. Cinegr. **Wolff & Byrd.** TV. Lorimar.
P: Joel Simon, Bill Todman Jr. EP/D: Joe Dante. Fox.
☐ **Wonder Woman.** AN TV. **Zen.** Film. S: J. Randal Johnson, Joel Gross. TriStar. LA TV series. F. Chan. AN TV series. Nel.

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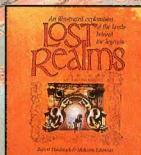
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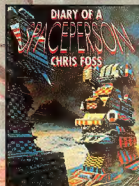
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Welcome to the Ultraverse, the future of superhero comics! Created by some of the industry's most talented writers, the Ultraverse will put the story first! Most importantly, the Ultraverse will ship on time!

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Written by Gerard Jones, **FreeX** is the saga of five teenaged victims of a genetics experiment gone mad!

- Reg./Sale
- FreeX 1 (Bagged w/ card) 1.95/1.75
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HARDCASE

Written by James Hudnall, **Hardcase** is the Ultraverse's most powerful character!

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- Hardcase 1 (with coupon) 1.95/1.75
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PRIME

Written by Gerard Jones, Jason is a 13 year old who can transform himself into Prime - the strongest character!

- Reg./Sale
- Prime 1 (with coupon) 1.95/1.75
- Contains one of five special coupons!
- Prime 2 (with card) 1.95/1.75
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MANTRA

Written by Mike Barr, **Mantra** is the ultimate warrior with a big twist! He is reincarnated on Earth as a woman!!!

- Reg./Sale
- Mantra 1 (Bagged w/ card) 1.95/1.75
- Bagged with a SkyBox Ultraverse card!

STRANGERS

Written by Steve Engelhart, **Strangers** introduces a powerful team of heroes!

- Reg./Sale
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- Strangers 2 (with card) 1.95/1.75

ULTRA-SET

These low-priced sets will ensure you don't miss out!!!! Recommended!

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